

The Magic of Modernity: Fengshui in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Fengshui has been practiced in Hong Kong for a long time. This use of magic is still commonly seen in this modern society although people nowadays do not have much freedom in choosing the orientations of their tomb, home or workplace. Moreover, information about fengshui and fengshui specialists is everywhere. The phenomenon is so widespread that people may not be aware that a certain degree of fengshui practice enters their daily life.

The study firstly explores how the Hong Kong public views the ancient practice. I use an example, the Nina Wang case, to show the general perception toward the use of fengshui. Secondly, I look into the impact of high-profile fengshui masters on the fengshui industry. Furthermore, I examine the circle of fengshui believers from the viewpoints of different participants: conventional fengshui specialists and fengshui users. Being a learner in fengshui classes is also a part of my investigation, to see how outsiders are transformed into insiders. By displaying the various aspects of the contemporary fengshui practice in Hong Kong, I try to discuss how fengshui survives in this modern city. At the same time, different actors' contributions make the practice evolve and remain relevant to Hong Kong people's life continuously. In fact, faith and skepticism go together and play an important role in the inescapable situation of fengshui in Hong Kong.

In this research, I attempt to provide a deeper understanding of the fengshui application in Hong Kong from an anthropological perspective. This study is primarily based on the ethnographic data collected from in-depth interviews and participant observation, from March to October 2008. Media analysis is also used for this research.

論文摘要

香港是一個高度國際化及現代化的都市，但對香港人來說，使用風水並不是稀奇事。今時今日，在這人多地少的城市裡，縱使人們在居住、工作以及墓地的地點和方位上可作出的選擇不多，但這些限制並沒有影響香港人利用風水，我們仍然可以在香港不同的角落看到不同的風水佈局和擺設。再者，關於風水的資訊及產物非常普遍。在現今的香港，風水可謂隨處可見。雖然自稱相信和使用風水的人並不是大多數，但其實香港人的生活與風水可是息息相關。

首先，本文會以龔如心爭產案例，討論香港人對使用風水的看法。另外，我亦會在這研究中試行探討現今如明星般的風水師其實對香港的玄學界帶來的衝擊。還有，藉著訪問普通風水師及風水使用者，以及參與風水課程作田野考察，我可以從不同角度去了解風水的圈子。從以上各點，本文會嘗試從人類學角度分析風水在香港沒有因時間而被淘汰的原因，以及理解其演變的因由。其中，人們對風水的信念(faith)及懷疑(skepticism)扮演著重要的角色。

Declaration of Anonymity and Confidentiality

In this thesis, all fieldwork data presented has been edited to preserve informants' anonymity. All the names used in this paper are pseudonyms and non-relevant biographical information has been changed to protect their identities.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

When I first considered doing a research on fengshui, I thought it was very “important” in Hong Kong people’s life. By “important” I mean people are aware of it and even apply it intentionally in their everyday life. In part, I was influenced by the many TV programs, newspaper and magazine columns, and popular movies in which high profile and famous fengshui masters offer advice and comment on business and public affairs. However, when I did the preparation before I finished my research proposal and asked some of my friends if they used fengshui at home or in the office, their answers to this question were all negative. It disappointed me and I wondered if I should pick another topic for my thesis since it seemed that I had overestimated the salience of fengshui in Hong Kong people’s lives. However, when my friends talked about moving home and house decoration, it suddenly occurred to me that people might not be aware of the influence of fengshui in their daily life. In fact, fengshui can be taken in an unconscious way. Here is one of the examples to show how influential fengshui is in both perspectives. One of my friends, who claims herself to be a non-believer of fengshui, has moved to a new office. As there is an overhead beam at the new place, she and her colleagues, upon noticing that beam, reminded each other not to sit underneath it. When I asked my friend about the problems of sitting under a beam, she could only tell me it was bad because the beam was “pressing” the “head” (橫樑壓頂). Another friend of mine faced a similar situation in her bedroom, where there is a beam across the ceiling. She has never put any fengshui ornaments in the house, but she has installed a suspended ceiling in her bedroom to hide the beam. According to fengshui theory, people should not sit or sleep under such a beam, as it is believed that people who sleep or sit underneath a beam for a long period of time will

develop health problems. This is because the beam directs killing *qi* downwards, affecting the people underneath. The fengshui users I spoke with are aware of this fengshui taboo (see Chapter 6). However, although my friends claim not to use or believe in fengshui, they are affected by fengshui ideas in their daily practice.

Compared to the subtle effect of fengshui on people's life, the industry of metaphysics (玄學) and metaphysicists (玄學家)¹ in Hong Kong are not low-profile at all. Instead, some fengshui masters in Hong Kong are like celebrities. People can see them on television and on the entertainment page of newspapers. Their publications are sold in bookstores and convenience stores. They also do movies and songs. Moreover, these masters do not only gain fames but real profits as well. One of a famous fengshui master in Hong Kong, Mak Ling-ling (麥玲玲) said that she had to pay the tax of around 600,000 to 7000,00 dollars every year (Hong Kong Economic Times 2008a) while another metaphysicists, So Man-fung, claimed that he had hundreds of millions dollars (Wong 2007:P34) (see Chapter 3). These huge numbers can result from the large number of clients, or large amounts the clients are willing to pay for the fengshui services. The deceased billionaire, Nina Wang, paid billions of dollars in return for a fengshui solution to her health problems (see Chapter 2). It appears to me that these specialists and the industry of fengshui do play a role in people's life in Hong Kong. This is one of the reasons why I have proposed fengshui as my research topic at the beginning.

¹ In this thesis, I will use metaphysics to describe the discipline of Chinese divination in general, which involves a lot of Chinese philosophy, and metaphysicists for those who practice the divination.

Literature Review

What is Fengshui?

Literally in Chinese fengshui means “wind and water” and some scholars may use the term “geomancy” as a translation. However, there is no concrete definition of fengshui. The core of fengshui is about the flow of *qi* (氣). The right flow of *qi* brings good fortune and the wrong one leads to misfortune. Fengshui is used for the habitation of the living and of the dead, i.e. houses and tombs. In the perspective of fengshui, the sites for both dwellings are influential to the living people. Hence, getting the auspicious fengshui locations for home and tomb and assuring the right flow of *qi* is a way to make the life of the living better.

To find a good place for home or tomb, some people hire a fengshui master. For fengshui of the dead, specialists help finding auspicious sites for burials or niches. Picking a good time for burial, exhumation or deposition of ash in niche can be a job of the specialist as well. For the fengshui of home in Hong Kong, picking a place for building own house is almost impossible but fengshui masters can be involved at different stages: property hunting, pre-decoration, or even after residing for years. By using different means, according to the school that the fengshui master practices, the specialist can help the clients to find a suitable house or grave, or to solve fengshui problems within their living space. Remedies for these problems include changing the house layout and decoration, and moving furniture, although rituals are not necessarily performed². In fact, many specialists claim themselves as metaphysicists (玄學家,

² Ole Bruun says “Seeing fengshui also involves ritual, for instance the killing of a cock and the sprinkling of its blood on a building-site, which is supposed to drive away evil spirits” (Bruun 2003:4). It may be the case of rural “fengshui-seeing”, as Bruun mentioned. However, according to my informants, normally no ritual is needed for onsite fengshui survey of residences.

mentioned above), instead of fengshui masters because they do not only practice fengshui but the whole discipline of metaphysics.

There are two major schools of fengshui: The School of Forms, or *Lyun Tau* (巒頭) and The School of Cosmology, or *Lei Hei* (理氣), which are commonly called in Hong Kong. The two schools can also be called the Jiangxi School and the Fujian School (Feuchtwang [1974] 1982:17-18; Bruun 2003:5). The School of Forms focuses on shapes and forms of the landscapes. All physical structures such as hills, rivers, buildings, flyovers and so on affect the flow of *qi*. No fengshui compass is needed for fengshui specialists who practice this school of fengshui. The School of Cosmology has to do with directions and constellations. Under this school there are numerous branches, for instance, Eight Mansions and Flying Stars. Different branches have distinct methods to determine the fengshui of a site. These methods consider time, directions, five elements, constellations etc. Since this school has to deal with directions, a fengshui compass is needed. The fengshui compasses used for practicing different branches are different. In Hong Kong, many fengshui masters use both schools when they give fengshui consultations as the two schools are complementary to each other. All versions share these general concepts of fengshui.

Past Studies about Fengshui

Although fengshui has interested scholars of various discipline such as anthropology (see Feuchtwang 1974, Bruun 2003), architecture (see Mak and So 2009), geography (see Knapp 1999), that does not mean the definition of fengshui is clear. Different people have different interpretations of “fengshui”. Ole Bruun (2003) sees fengshui not as a system but a part of the Chinese cultural whole and “it is in the active process of application to a specific social context that fengshui acquires its most

distinguishing features” (Bruun 2003:5). Some previous researches can show us different sides of fengshui.

Ernest J. Eitel was a missionary and he gave his first publication about fengshui in 1873. In his book, he describes fengshui as “a system of superstition, supposed to teach people where and when to build a tomb or to erect a house so as to insure for those concerned everlasting prosperity and happiness” (Eitel [1873] 1985: 3). On the other hand, he also suggests fengshui is “another name for natural science” (ibid:3). Since science in China has not been developed like in the West, fengshui, as Chinese natural science, was the people’s emotions towards the nature. In this missionary’s view, fengshui is a combination of science and religion (Eitel [1873] 1985).

Proving fengshui is superstition is not everyone’s intention. Some early anthropologists also mentioned fengshui. For example, in *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, Sir James Frazer uses the example concerning fengshui and the shapes of city Yung-chun (永春) and of town Tsuen-cheu-fu (or Quanzhoufu 泉州府) to illustrate imitative magic (Frazer [1890] 1920:169-170). Moreover, Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss point out in *Primitive Classification* that the society affects how the ideas of things such as time, space, class, etc. are formed. The principles of fengshui, or the Chinese classification of space, is actually a product of the society (Durkheim and Mauss [1903] 1963). Max Weber sees fengshui as a Chinese magic that prevents the development of capitalism, because the concept of fengshui clashes with the new factory and railroad constructions, which are needed for a rational economy (Weber [1927] 2003:361).

Since there are different people referring fengshui as including different things such as religion, science, philosophy and at the same time it has been commonly

practiced by Chinese in their daily life, Stephan Feuchtwang ([1974] 1982) thinks that studying fengshui from the perspective of anthropology can see how various Chinese ideas and values are embodied in the practice of fengshui (Feuchtwang [1974] 1982:3-6). Since Feuchtwang defines fengshui on one hand as divination and a kind of knowledge on the other (ibid:14), he includes two approaches to fengshui in his book, documentary analysis and practices. He pays more attention on the first part and he uses secondary data for the analysis of the second section. In the analysis of manuals, Feuchtwang finds that there are inconsistencies between different theories used in fengshui. It is the fengshui specialist's choice to use certain theories for interpreting a particular case (ibid:107). The practice of fengshui also differs greatly between different places. By their practice, people can identify themselves, as individuals or as a community, from other peoples. The centre of fengshui practice is self interest (ibid:240). Moreover, Feuchtwang suggests that fengshui is a way to perceive and conceive of reality on one hand, and a way to deal with it on the other (ibid:245). The application of fengshui is motivated by anxiety. Fengshui can deal with the emotions created by both social factors and natural factors (ibid:243). As there are many symbols in fengshui, people perceive and manipulate them so as to release the anxiety.

Another anthropologist, Ole Bruun, defines fengshui not as a system but a part of the Chinese cultural whole. He also recognizes it as a kind of knowledge, not a belief. He suggests that "it is in the active process of application to a specific social context that fengshui acquires its most distinguishing features" (Bruun 2003:5) and hence he takes two approaches, historical as well as anthropological, to study the development of fengshui in China. He thinks only by using both approaches can he give the full picture of the situation.

For the first approach, the historical one, Bruun examines the fengshui

practices and the related policies from the mid nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. Fengshui was not popular among the literati until after 1850s. In the imperial period, the attitude of the imperial state toward fengshui was not clear. On one hand, fengshui was seen as heterodox, as contrasted to the state orthodoxy of Confucianism, and was suppressed. On the other hand, fengshui was used as an instrument for mobilizing people to fight against the western invasion. With the end of the imperial period and the rise of the Communist Party, three things were emphasized: atheism, science and progress. The use of fengshui in rural area was considered backward and superstitious. Fengshui and other religious cults and practices were under the state's tight control so as to control people's minds. Hence, threats to the state power were prevented (Bruun 2003).

Bruun did anthropological fieldwork in two provinces, Sichuan and Jiangsu, and he found that the rapid change and development of the places created new environments and conditions for fengshui. For instance, modernization led to the new regulations about the handling a dead body, altering tradition as the dead had to be buried in a cemetery and the body had to be burned before burial. Therefore, fengshui masters changed their job from searching for a good place for burial to choosing the right urn chambers for their clients. Although the state opposed "superstition", the local governments regarded fengshui as a supplement in terms of money as they use "good fengshui" for the promotion of industrial development zone, housing project and cemetery to attract buyers and investors (Bruun 2003:157-158). People used fengshui not only in rural areas but in cities. As the competition in cities was growing keen, people consulted fengshui masters for a better house setting in order to deal with the competing environment. Fengshui has transformed along with the social as well as political changes (Bruun 2003).

Fengshui, as Bruun believes, becomes more important in a “high-tension, low-trust environment” (Bruun 2003:259)—the state was not reliable. The discrepancy between urban and rural result from the state development created this distrust and tense environment. Hence people, especially those in rural areas, use fengshui as a means to against state power. At the same time, fengshui can be an amoral explanation for one’s success, contrasted with the ideas of collective goodness. People in difference contexts use fengshui in their own ways for fulfilling different various needs (Bruun 2003).

The early studies of fengshui are not holistic enough as they have limited field data. Feuchtwang tries to give a whole picture but he has put more effort on the symbolic side of fengshui. Bruun has provided a more holistic findings but it is only valid in a particular context of mainland China. In order to know more about the phenomenon of the application of fengshui in Hong Kong, we have to take a look at other studies which take Hong Kong as the focus.

The Use of Fengshui in Hong Kong

The practice of fengshui is not something new in Hong Kong and this phenomenon has attracted some anthropologists’ attention.

In the 1960s, many anthropologists studied the New Territories and did their fieldworks in different indigenous villages such as Ping Shan (see Jack Potter 1970), San Tin (James Watson 2004) and Ha Tsuen (Rubie Watson 2004). In their research, their main focus was not on one particular religious ritual or fengshui, but the communal life as a whole. However, in their books, religious elements are often discussed, because they are integrated with other aspects and become a part of the villagers’ life. Within the communal life, Jack Potter (1970), Maurice Freedman

(1979), and James Watson (2004) and Rubie Watson (2004) mention the daily use of fengshui in the New Territories.

Maurice Freedman (1979) did research in the New Territories of Hong Kong in the 1960s. He argued fengshui provides an amoral explanation for one's success or failure as people need not do good to "accumulate" fengshui (Freedman 1979:198). Fortune will follow as long as the *qi* flows in the right direction. Moreover, it is an instrument of competition. Since the location of an ancestors' tomb is closely related to descendants' fortune, the descendants compete with one another in order to get more advantage from it (ibid:329). Defending one's own interests by means of fengshui is not only within the social circle of a clan but in a greater power struggle in politics. The village is united to fight against the government when public works destruct the village's fengshui (ibid:203-206). Freedman also comments on the difference in the application of fengshui between urban and rural people. The restrictions on full-body burial and the constraints of the living environment limit urban people's ability to maximize the benefits of fengshui. In the urban setting, the use of fengshui, Freedman thinks, is an explanation for bad luck while the use of it in rural area is both explanatory and speculative (ibid:200-202). At the same time, people in urban area can easily escape from the fengshui since they are more individualistic. However, the atmosphere of villages creates a stronger social pressure so that fengshui is still very influential to the villagers (ibid:206-207). Jack Potter (1970) and Rubie Watson (2004) give the similar illustrations as Freedman when they studied the cases of Ping Shan and Ha Tsuen respectively.

However, James Watson and Rubie Watson (2008) describe how fengshui in the New Territories has changed. In the colonial period, fengshui was used to strive for benefits by the indigenes against the colonial government. It helped the villagers to

construct and to maintain their landscape, and hence to create the sense of community. It was also a way to solve local problems, in that it provided a language in which conflict and different interests could be discussed. But since the development of the New Territories and the change of sovereignty, the local people's view on fengshui has changed. The political meaning of fengshui faded and it has less power in preserving the environment. Moreover, the practice has become more personal and less communal. To some people, it is a kind of "religion" (Watson 2008:225). The new perspectives towards fengshui in the New Territories are more similar to those of the urbanite.

Contemporaneously, Baruch Boxer did a study about the urbanization in Tsuen Wan. At that time, the Hong Kong government started to develop agricultural Tsuen Wan area into a new industrial and commercial town. With C.K. Yang's (1961:263-265) idea about fengshui as a means increasing people's confidence to deal with uncertainty, Boxer finds that fengshui plays a role of mediator and facilitates the urbanization process because the views of both sides were expressed and responded to in the process. Therefore, the urbanization was carried out smoothly (Boxer 1968).

A comparatively more recent research about fengshui in urban Hong Kong was done by Charles F. Emmons in the 1980s. He points out that, unlike the large flexibility in manipulation of space in a rural area, fengshui in an urban setting can be used in two ways. Changing the interior setting, like by moving the furniture, is one way and this is used for both workplaces and households. Another way is to alter the external features of the buildings, for instance, moving the direction of the entrance or adding protective devices. Urban people do these things to pray for wealth and the health of individuals, and for success in business. The interests sought through fengshui in urban areas seem more individualistic compared to their rural counterparts. Emmons claims that,

corresponding to Malinowski's view about the functions of magical rites, fengshui helps people to reduce pressure and anxiety for issues that scientific methods cannot solve, and that this is useful in a modern capitalistic society that is extremely competitive (Emmons 1992).

Though we have quite a lot ethnographic information concerning the application of fengshui in indigenous villages in Hong Kong and a bit about Hong Kong under urbanization, the studies were at least two decades ago. Moreover, the fengshui masters and the whole industry of metaphysics in Hong Kong are rarely mentioned.

Fieldsite Specification

Hong Kong

Since fengshui is practised in many places, especially in Chinese societies, why is Hong Kong chosen as the focus of this study? It can be explained by the uniqueness of Hong Kong.

First of all, the historical background makes Hong Kong a very unique city. Hong Kong was colonized by the British for about 150 years. During the colonial period, Hong Kong was given the freedom of religion. In contrast to mainland China, the religious beliefs and practices in Hong Kong were not much affected by the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1969. This freedom has been continued after the handover of sovereignty in 1997 so that Hong Kong people still enjoy these rights. Moreover, in these years, Hong Kong has been developed as a free capitalist market. Different religious practices can be regarded as means to enhance one's "ability" in this competitive environment (Hsu 1967, cited in Emmons, 1992:40). Hong Kong,

with this background, allows people to maintain their religious beliefs and practices for the use in different ways without being seen as superstitious.

Second, the industry of divinations and fengshui is highly commercialized and widespread in Hong Kong. There are many fengshui and divination masters publishing annual Chinese horoscope almanacs every year. Starting from September, people can see advertisements for various books concerning the prediction of the coming year in MTR stations and on newspapers. These almanacs can be bought everywhere even in convenience stores. It is reported that there are about 400,000 copies sold in the Hong Kong market every year (Eastweek 2006). Furthermore, these books are translated into English and other languages, which are sold worldwide. Simplified Chinese editions are also published catering to mainland Chinese readers. Many masters use various means to increase their exposure and hence attract followers, or “fans”. For example, the covers of those fengshui guides or almanacs are the photos of the masters. These specialists also host radio or television programs talking about fengshui and fortune telling on a regular basis. Featuring in advertisements, movies and songs is not uncommon as well. These make the Hong Kong masters well-known not only in Hong Kong but also other Chinese societies.

Last but not least, fengshui is very pervasive in Hong Kong. On one hand, it is not an unfamiliar topic to Hong Kong people. One of the famous legends is the “fengshui competition” between Bank of China Tower and the headquarters of The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation in Central (Chin 2009:P29). People believe it is not only an economic “competition” but also a political one. In 1997, the former Chief Executive of Hong Kong, Tung Chee-hwa, refused to move into the Government House³ and insisted on living in his own apartment. At that time people

³ The Government House was the residence of the Hong Kong Governor during the colonial period. Tung Chee-hwa’s successor, Donald Tsang Yam-kuen, moved into the Government House in 2006

speculated it was related to the fengshui problems (Singtao Daily 2005:Z07). Moreover, the Audit Commission of the Hong Kong SAR Government discovered that the Hong Kong Applied Science and Technology Research Institute had spent HKD 181,000 on fengshui consultation for moving office (Audit Commission 2007) and this created the public criticism about the improper use of government money. While the criticism might suggest that fengshui is viewed as “superstitious” and perhaps not part of mainstream Hong Kong culture, fengshui consultations upon moving office are very common in Hong Kong, and the fact that the Institute spent the money on fengshui demonstrates this. These incidents also show that fengshui is mentioned in social, economic and political situations in Hong Kong.

If we take a closer look to the local newspapers in Hong Kong, we may find that fengshui is more than those incidents. As mentioned in above paragraphs, fengshui as the headlines in local news and entertainment news is not uncommon. In addition to economic and political fengshui battles and those celebrity-like fengshui specialists, the topic of fengshui comes up in different kinds of social issues in Hong Kong. For example, villagers complain that new development projects or new buildings nearby will change the landscape and hence the fengshui of their village, and singers or actors seek fengshui remedies to save their sinking careers. Readers are used to this kind of news. Moreover, the topic of fengshui, and other aspects of metaphysics, are not limited to the local news and entertainment sections of the newspapers. In the financial and property market pages, people can see discussions of the fengshui of various properties and how bankers apply fengshui in their offices. In the Racing and Sports sections, how the horse owners use fengshui in the stables is reported and fortune telling about the football matches and equestrian races are provided for the

gamblers' consideration. Furthermore, in the papers' supplements, it is not uncommon for columnists to write articles about fengshui-related stories, from commentary on Nina Wang (see Chapter 2) to stories of friends' experiences with fengshui. Fengshui and other metaphysical suggestions are given in the adult section for people of different horoscopes to boost their fortune in romance; some even explain how to use fengshui considerations when picking the right sex toys. Basically, people in Hong Kong will frequently find the topic of fengshui in the newspapers and have every chance to access fengshui information, unless they do not read newspapers. It seems that fengshui is a part of Hong Kong people's life, whether you are a believer or non-believer.

Fengshui Classes

My major fieldsite was set at the fengshui classes organized by a labour union in Hong Kong. For this study, I have taken the elementary interior fengshui (室內風水初階) and the intermediate interior fengshui (室內風水進階), from April to October 2008. Each course consisted of twelve, one-and-a-half hour lessons. According to the brief introduction written given by the labour union, the objective of the elementary course was to teach people to apply fengshui to modern architecture and interior design while the intermediate one aimed at providing further study for the students who have finished the elementary course.

The labour union which organized the courses I took provides other hobby and interest classes every season. Apart from interior fengshui, they also offer a variety of courses about metaphysics, for instance, Chinese almanac reading (通勝) and date

picking, face reading, palm reading, Flying Stars (飛星)⁴ fengshui and so on. These courses cost around six hundred to seven hundred dollars. In fact, there are many other fengshui courses provided by various organizations or people in Hong Kong such as fengshui masters' private centers and district councilor's office. The cost of these courses varies. Normally ordinary metaphysicists' centers charge several thousand dollars and the tuition fee of the famous fengshui specialists can be tens of thousand dollars per course. The labour union charges less in general; their courses are accessible by the public and they provide several time slots in centers of different districts for elementary fengshui course, allowing people from different social classes or age range to participate in them. Picking it as my fieldsite helped me to obtain data from people with different backgrounds. Taking this course could give me a reference to see how general people make use of fengshui in their household and office, and how the fengshui masters deal with their potential clients.

Objectives and Significance

The application of fengshui is very common in Hong Kong. Fengshui settings, such as aquaria and plants in offices and escalators at unusual angles in shopping malls, and are easily seen in commercial buildings and information about fengshui is everywhere. The use of it is so widespread that even people who are not aware of it accept certain aspects and concepts of fengshui in their life. In this study, I will try to explore this phenomenon in Hong Kong.

Firstly, the view of the general public toward fengshui will be explored. Since it is not possible to interview all the people in Hong Kong, I will use an example to illustrate how the public see this ancient practice. Moreover, I will take a look at the

⁴ Flying Stars fengshui: a branch of fengshui under the School of Cosmology.

impacts of the high profile metaphysicists on the fengshui industry in Hong Kong today. How these public figures portray their role of “fengshui masters” and how they do business as famous masters is quite different from the conventional fengshui masters’ stories.

Going further I will try to study how fengshui survives in a modern city like Hong Kong. Since Hong Kong is a very international and modern Chinese society, fengshui is still practised in many aspects of life. Not only are the locals engaged in this practice, but foreigners who live and work in this city sometimes also adopt fengshui⁵. The survival and the inescapable nature of fengshui will be explored. To have a deeper understanding of it, I will provide the motivation of different actors’, including fengshui users and fengshui specialists, for learning as well as using fengshui in Hong Kong.

This research will focus on the use of fengshui in urban Hong Kong. Many of the previous anthropological studies about fengshui in Hong Kong mainly concern with the New Territories, or more precisely, the indigenous villages like Ping Shan (Potter 1970) and Ha Tsuen in Yuen Long (Watsons 2004). Their focus is on how fengshui is taken for the communal purposes in the rural settings. Since most of the Hong Kong people are engaged in a more individual city life, I attempt to see the role of fengshui outside the communal life. Secondly, a picture about the current situation of the use of fengshui in Hong Kong will be provided in this research since the existing studies about this phenomenon were mostly done in the 1960s-1980s. Compared to the past, fengshui has become more commercialized and its application has been more personal and individualistic. Thirdly, my research will include the point of view of the

⁵ One example is the Hong Kong Disneyland. They sought fengshui advice for picking park location as well as dates of major works (Wenweipo 2003). Furthermore, fengshui was used in the design of the park. An example was the front door angle, which was changed by twelve degrees in order to assure the fortune (Holson 2005).

fengshui masters in Hong Kong, which is rarely found in the existing researches. This study offers empirical research that can fill the present gaps.

Methodology

In this study, mainly qualitative research methods have been used. These methods include participant-observation and interviews, which were for collecting ethnographic data. Moreover, data from newspaper and other media reports was used in this research.

Change of Research Plan

My original plan was to do participant observation alongside a fengshui master in order to see the interaction between the fengshui specialists and his clients during onsite consultations. Through this, I could access to other fengshui-related informants by snowball sampling. Richard Yu, a master I met in March 2008 through another informant, was willing to be my key informant and welcomed my idea. He promised he would contact me once he went to do onsite fengshui surveys. However, after the first in-depth interview in late March 2008 and several follow up phone calls shortly after the interview, he ignored my phone calls and emails. I tried to contact him through the informant who introduced me to him, but this was in vain. I tried to contact other fengshui specialists but no one was willing to be observed when they were serving their clients. In fact, I had prepared for the unstable business of the fengshui master and I joined a fengshui class to collect supplementary data in case I did not have many opportunities to do participation observation in onsite fengshui surveys. However, the sudden disconnection with the original key informant and the lack of substitute made me move my focus to the fengshui classes.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is one of the methods to collect the ethnographic data in my research. Taking elementary and intermediate interior fengshui classes, I sat in the classrooms with other people who were interested in fengshui and learnt the ancient knowledge together. Being a researcher, I attempted to know and build rapport with the fengshui teachers and the fellow students so that I could interview them later. However, it was a difficult to cultivate relationships with the fellow students because of several reasons. Since the classes were one on Sunday morning and the other on Wednesday evening, the students were either not really awake, rushing from office or hurrying off for dinner. No students were there to chit chat before or after the lessons. Moreover, the lack of interaction in the elementary class and the highly attentive atmosphere of the intermediate course made talking to other students in the classes very difficult. Beside the students, I could get to know two fengshui instructors in the classes and hence had brief interviews with them. Perhaps a more extroverted researcher might have been able to overcome these difficulties, but I found it difficult to develop a conversation with fellow students who remained, week after week, complete strangers.

Although the cultivation of relationship in the fengshui classes with the fellow classmates was not successful, participant-observation was still an important part of my fieldwork in this study. I could collect the ethnographic data from my observation, and I could see the attitudes of the fengshui teachers when they were facing their students, their potential clients, which might not be seen from interviews. I could also observe how the students interacted with the fengshui instructors and hence know what concerned them most and what they wanted to learn from the lessons. Therefore,

participant observation was necessary for me to get this valuable data.

Interviews

Since I did not have a chance to do participant observations during onsite fengshui surveys and consultations, interviews became the major approach to get data. For this research, I have interviewed nine fengshui masters, one fengshui master's assistant and ten fengshui users. The interviews were conducted from March 2008 to October 2008 and they were semi-structured. These informants were recruited through personal networks and from the fengshui classes.

The eight cases include ten fengshui users (two cases involve couples where both spouses are interested in fengshui). Only one couple introduced me to their fengshui master (this is my first fengshui master); two informants do not have a master, and the others were unwilling to introduce me to their master. Since one of my research targets was to explore how the fengshui users applied fengshui in their houses, I asked my informants for home visits. However, only three units of informants allowed me to conduct the interviews at their places and introduced me their fengshui settings. For the rest, they turned down my request and preferred to be interviewed somewhere else. Because most of them are friends of my friends. I did not know them until the interviews. I was a stranger to them. They did not mind "having a chat" with me at restaurants or answering my follow-up questions by phone. But they said their homes were "small" or "messy" and refused my request. These interviews took between one hour and three hours.

As for the informants who are fengshui specialists, four out of nine have fixed offices for their fengshui business. However, only one fengshui master and her assistant were interviewed at their shop. During the time of the interviews, there was

no client at the shop and hence no interaction between fengshui master and client could be seen. One of the aims of this study is to see how the fengshui masters learnt their skills and the way they do business. Apart from the two fengshui class teachers, who were interviewed after class and by phone for about half an hour, the rest of the interviews with fengshui masters were about two to three hours. Since most of these informants were friends of my friends or of relatives, they did not mind “chatting” with me. I think one of the reasons I can interview some of these fengshui masters is the helpful introduction of my friends. Some of them described my “terrible” experience with my first informant to their master friends and probably some decided to “help” me. Although they had no problem with being interviewed, they refused to be followed. These masters usually spent years in learning the skills and hence transforming into fengshui specialist, so in-depth interviews were used to produce life histories. Moreover, since the backgrounds of these masters are diverse, they can allow me to identify some of the common factors and experiences in the creation of fengshui masters in Hong Kong.

Media Analysis

Media materials concerning various fengshui-related news were analyzed in this research. In order to explore the discourse of fengshui in Hong Kong, the battle over Nina Wang’s will, the billionaire in Hong Kong who died in April 2007, was taken as an example. Shortly after the tycoon’s death, Tony Chan, a fengshui master, claimed to be the sole beneficiary of Wang’s fortune. Speculation, gossip and information about the case were widely reported thereafter. The battle moved to court and the news of the pre-trial and the trial always became the headline of newspapers and the covers of magazines from late 2008 to mid 2009. The case came to a temporary

conclusion in February 2010. Reports of newspapers and magazines were searched through *WiseNews*⁶ and were reviewed to investigate how the public viewed the case and how fengshui was presented in the media.

Another focus of this study is how the fengshui specialists present themselves to the people. Famous fengshui masters in Hong Kong appear on various media—television, radio, newspapers, magazines and their personal websites. To investigate how they establish their public images, two well-known fengshui masters were picked and their public works as well as interviews were analyzed.

Difficulties in Doing Fengshui Research

As an inexperienced anthropology student and an outsider of fengshui and metaphysics, conducting research in fengshui was not as easy as I imagined when I drafted my proposal, especially in terms of dealing with the fengshui specialists.

The first task I had to tackle was looking for informants. At first, I tried to email and call the fengshui masters who had put their contact on internet and invited them to be my interviewees. However, they either gave no reply or refused. One of them has even kept my email address in her mailing list and sent me promotional emails, after ignoring my invitation email. At the same time, I have asked my friends and relatives if they could introduce any masters to me. Some metaphysicists, who were my friends' relatives or friends, turned down the requests as they were reluctant to be interviewed, let alone being observed during fengshui consultation process.

Since it was difficult to access to the fengshui master informants, my original key informant gave me the hope to my original research plan. However, his sudden

⁶ *WiseNews* is a database that includes newspapers, magazines and journals published in the Greater China region, which includes all Hong Kong newspapers and the major magazines.

change of mind after one interview forced me to change my plan. Although my other informants provided me with some reasons for the difficulty in gaining access to a fengshui master (see Chapter 4), I have my own explanations. One of the possible reasons for his withdrawal was my clumsy interviewing skill which could not give him confidence for the further cooperation. Another explanation for this was that being flattered by the attention could not last long and the master developed a second thought. He might have re-considered giving me access because of the depth of my study and how much I might have to know. I would have exposed all this skills, or tricks, if he had let me to follow him during onsite fengshui surveys. There was always possibility that there were some situations he did not want to show me, such as his inability to answer difficult questions from clients or his giving inaccurate advice. At the same time, how he would handle these situations could be his secret tricks, which he, or fengshui masters in general, might not want to reveal. Apart from getting data from the master himself, participant observation in fengshui consultation would allow me to access to the clients. The fengshui master might be worried that I could ask his clients questions or expose any information that undermined his authority, and hence influence his business afterward. In order to prevent this revelation, he changed his mind and withdrew from my study. Though I tried to suggest to some masters that I would tag along as their assistant and not interfere with their work, Hong Kong fengshui masters do not normally have assistants, and certainly not female assistants, so this strategy did not seem to help my case.

Another thing that makes fengshui masters difficult for researchers is their eloquence. One of my informants has mentioned that being eloquent is a “basic requirement” for fengshui specialists so that they can defend their occasional mistakes and convince their clients to believe in what they tell them. Having this ability, they

can respond to my questions without actual answering or divert the conversation easily. Being a novice, interviewing these people was quite challenging.

Thesis Overview

In this study, I divide my findings into 7 chapters to show how explain the current phenomenon of fengshui application in modern Hong Kong.

In chapter 2, the case of the battle of Nina Wang's fortune will be used to explore how the Hong Kong people view fengshui. Although it is an extreme case, we can see the discourse of fengshui in Hong Kong by analyzing the new reports of the case.

Chapter 3 is about the famous fengshui specialists. Since the industry of fengshui is commercialized, the works of the well-known masters will be studied in order to see how they establish their images in front of the Hong Kong public, and how they enhance their business by being famous. In contrast to the celebrity-like specialists, the stories of ordinary fengshui masters will be provided in chapter 4. How they learn fengshui and how they become the specialists will be revealed in this chapter. Moreover, I will look into how they regard themselves and other fellow specialists, and what they do to maintain their competitiveness. These fengshui masters also provide explanations for my unsuccessful fieldwork.

Taking fengshui class is a way to peek into the mysterious industry. Chapter 5 will give the details of the classes I attended and we will see how people equip themselves for entering the field. Moreover, the teaching materials of the classes indicate how fengshui fits into modern life.

The application of fengshui by the users will be discussed in chapter 6. Fengshui helps them solve their problems, or achieving their goals. In this chapter we

will take a look at how these people use fengshui and what make their fengshui practice different from the others.

In chapter 7, I will use Michael Taussig's (2003) idea of magic, skepticism and faith to investigate how different actors help to make fengshui survive and inescapable in modern Hong Kong.

Chapter 2 – Nina Wang’s Case

After the death of Nina Wang Kung Yu-sum, the billionaire chairlady of Chinachem in April 2007, the battle over her fortune between her maiden family, represented by Chinachem Charitable Foundation, and her fengshui master, Tony Chan Chun-chuen started. Wang’s family held a 2002 will while Tony Chan presented a will signed in 2006. Each side claimed to be the sole beneficiary of Wang’s fortune, estimated at 100 billion Hong Kong dollars (Brieger 2008a; 2009a). The battle then moved to court. In fact, we may gain a bit more understanding about how fengshui stands in Hong Kong from this court case. Fengshui may not be a very common practice, but it is not far from Hong Kong people’s life.

Before the trial, judge Mr. Justice Johnson Lan Man-hon said in a hearing “This is a court of law, not a court of fung shui” (Brieger 2008b). He said this because the case involved a lot of fengshui elements and both sides had invited different fengshui experts to testify. The judge did not want the trial to turn into a debate about fengshui because he could not judge the questions like “which fengshui expert was better,” “was Tony Chan a good fengshui specialist” or “was fengshui will common or even effective” (Mingpao 2009c:A03). He could only make decision on the legal questions, not the fengshui ones. After the testimonies of the fengshui experts of two side, the judge still thought their help was limited and he personally had no interest in how the “insiders” of fengshui viewed fengshui wills (Mingpao 2009d:A09).

Despite the judge’s concerns, fengshui was still at the core of the trial. Wang’s family argued that Tony Chan was actually Nina Wang’s fengshui master and that the will Chan held was actually a “fengshui will.” A “fengshui will” is a will drawn up for

a ceremony in which it is burned and sent to the spirit world to confuse the spirits causing a person harm and thereby healing them or otherwise removing their problems. By claiming his will was a fengshui will, they were arguing that it was not a true reflection of Nina Wang's intentions and was not legally a will at all.

Chan denied the will was a fengshui will, and had his own spectacular argument. He revealed the surprising news that he had had a sexual relationship with Wang for many years, even while he married and started a family. He claimed his intimate relationship with Nina Wang was the reason why she left her assets to him (Mingpao 2008:A02).

A fengshui will aims at "fooling" the spirits by announcing the "death" of a sick person so that the ghosts will not disturb the person anymore. Thus the person who sets the will can solve the health problems in reality. The fengshui master is listed in the fengshui will as the sole beneficiary of the person because of the ability to communicate with the spirits. The will makes the spirits believe the fengshui specialist is the only representative of that person to deal with the spirits and the money. The will is supposed to be burnt as it is announced to the spirits (Apple Daily 2009a:A05; Brieger 2009b). In Nina Wang's case, her family believed that the 2006 will Tony Chan presented was not a real will but a fengshui will. They argued that Wang, who had by then been diagnosed having ovarian cancer, had signed the will as part of her attempt to seek help through fengshui. This act aimed at prolonging her life, not replacing her previous will. Therefore, the fengshui expert on behalf of the Wang family, Szeto Fat-ching, suggested in his report that Tony Chan was a dishonest fengshui master as he had secretly kept the fengshui will for use upon her death instead of burning it in the ritual (Mingpao 2009a:A02).

This led to much discussion of the ethics of fengshui masters. Since Tony Chan

claimed he had been Nina Wang's lover for fourteen years (Crawford 2008; Brieger and Fong 2009a), some claimed that his behavior suggested his character is dishonest. In fact, this sexual part of the story was the part that the public was most curious about. Yu Chi-lun, a fengshui master who planted a "life base" (生基; see below) for Wang, said that fengshui masters should keep a distance from their clients. Yu insisted that he would never become a close friend with his clients and being tight-lipped was important because fengshui masters could know a lot of personal and private things about their clients (Mingpao 2009b:A18).

Moreover, there were two persons, one of Nina Wang's assistants and a solicitor, witnessed Wang signed the 2006 will and they both thought the will they witness was about giving more than 10 million dollars to a person with surname "Chan", not the same as the one Tony Chan held. The solicitor witness realized the will Wang signed was a partial will as the will was short, and nothing about the Chinachem empire was mentioned. He reminded Wang about it and Wang replied that she would handle it later. The Nina Wang assistant asked her why she signed the "partial will" and Wang told him "Don't worry" (Fong 2009; Brieger and Fong, 2009c). This suggested Wang never intended to make a new will and was aware the "partial will" she signed in 2006 was a fengshui will, which she seemed to be confident would be used for fengshui only. This could imply her unshakable trust toward the fengshui master. Such trust could be built on her expectations of how a fengshui specialist should behave. Although there is no formal code of ethics for fengshui masters like there are other professions such as doctors and lawyers, some behaviors are regarded as sinful. Being dishonest is clearly not acceptable among fengshui masters, any more than it is in business or in general social relationships.

In Nina Wang's case, people were shocked that fengshui could be seen as a

knowledge that brought Tony Chan, or her other fengshui masters, power to “control” her wealth and health. As fengshui masters can have such a power, why there nobody pay attention to how to use their knowledge? This question can be answered in two ways. Szeto Fat-ching expressed once that “Fengshui master has the ability to understand the hidden plans of heaven, help own self as well as the others, they should have the hearts of benefactor, if they act against it, or even to embezzle charity donation, the gods and human beings will all be angry, retribution will be seen”⁷ (Eastweek 2009:A10-18). It seemed that bad effect would be caused to those fengshui specialists who behaved improperly. For general public, the answer to the question was the fengshui master's words were never taken seriously. In Cantonese, there is a popular proverb “風水佬呢你十年八年”⁸, which is used to remind people not to take fengshui seriously as you can never know the saying of the fengshui master is true or not. This shows a mutual understanding among people that what fengshui specialists say is not completely right and thus people do not take it seriously.

Another side story about the case which interested people was the “life base”(生基). Planting a life base is a fengshui ritual aiming to solve problems like illness, financial difficulties and so on. The name and the eight characters of the person are written on a puppet and it is put in a coffin with some personal belongings like clothes, hair, or nail clippings. The coffin is then sealed and placed at an auspicious location (Fong and Tsui 2009a; 2009b). One fengshui master for Nina Wang, Yu Chi-lun, planted a life base for Wang in a fengshui cave in Guangxi. Yu told Wang that the day for the ritual would be different depending on the purpose and the auspicious day for various purposes could not be the same. At that time, Wang had to deal with the

⁷ The original text: 「風水師有能力洞悉天機，助己助人，應有濟世之心，若然反正道而行，甚至想侵吞用於慈善的巨款，當真人神共憤，肯定報應不爽。」

⁸ Literally means “fengshui masters cheat you ten years, eight years.”

court case against her father-in-law on the one hand and her cancer on the other. She had to decide whether the life base was for winning the court case and thus getting all the inheritance of her husband, or for her to recover from the illness. Eventually, she chose the former over good health. Wang was happy as she won the court case and then she consulted Yu and asked for planting another life base. However, Yu informed her that the second life base could only be planted one thousand days after the first one. Wang died before she could plant another life base (Apple Daily 2009d:A04). In this situation, it seemed that Nina Wang's death was the consequence of her placing the court case, or her husband's fortune, over her life. It can also be seen as the limitation of fengshui, but it is notable that it fits and reinforces the logic of fengshui as a system and practice.

Apart from the public's concern about the romantic relationship between Nina Wang and her fengshui master, some legislative councilors paid more attention to the tax evasion problems as fengshui masters usually got "red packets" from their clients instead of formal payments (South China Morning Post 2009). The former personal assistant of Nina Wang reported that he had delivered suitcases of cash to the "fengshui people" who worked for Wang (Fong 2009). Moreover, Yu Chi-lun got one hundred thousand dollars for planting the "life base" for Wang and he got a "red packet" of ten million Hong Kong dollars after Wang won the court case against her father-in-law (Apple Daily 2009b:A02). These details were revealed in court and drew lawmakers' concern. In Hong Kong, all income, even from tips and "red packets," are generally considered insignificant and ignored by tax authorities, but the hundreds of thousands of dollars being spent on fengshui services should have been reported as income and so became a way for legislators to criticize services and money transfers that they probably also object to in principle.

In addition, Nina Wang's belief in fengshui and her behaviors were widely described as "bizarre" and "superstitious" by the media. It was said that she used fengshui since the second abduction of her husband Teddy Wang. Her fengshui acts included having several fengshui masters and repeatedly digging holes for "life bases" in various locations. Her former personal assistant had tried to persuade Wang not to depend too much on fengshui. However, Wang seemed to have her own ideas. She even consulted her fengshui master to pick a date for flights and got fengshui masters' advice on new drugs once she had cancer (Apple Daily 2009b:A02, 2009c:A04; Fong 2009). In fact, Wang's "superstition" was described as the reason why she was easily influenced by her fengshui master Tony Chan and it was an argument of Wang's family that signing that 2006 "fengshui will" was one of Nina Wang's "superstitious" behaviors (Brieger and Fong 2009b). Thus, at the same time that fengshui is widely known and accepted in Hong Kong, the Wang family also was able to use an equally common discourse that views fengshui as superstitious nonsense. The fact that she would sign such a will is presented by the family as showing that she is not entirely of sound mind. A personal friend, who was a surgeon, of Nina Wang testified in the court and he described Wang was mentally unstable around the time she signed the 2006 will. Wang mentioned to him that somebody wanted to hurt her and she was asked to sign on a white paper. She also told that a friend of her took her underwear, clothes and hair to mainland China for "some tasks" so that she would get better afterward. The witness found Wang spoke incoherently and was mentally unstable (Apple Daily 2009f:A08).

Insiders' Views on Nina Wang's Case

Different fengshui specialists thought that Nina Wang's case negatively affected the fengshui industry. Since the huge amount of money that Wang spent on

fengshui and the “life restoring” rituals were widely reported in the media, this would lead to doubts from the public toward fengshui masters and the industry. Did all fengshui masters ask for high prices? Were all specialists able to restore clients’ life by planting life bases? Szeto Fat-ching, the fengshui expert who testified in court for Chinachem, and Joseph Yu, the fengshui expert who testified for Tony Chan, both thought their testimonies helped to clarify the public’s misunderstandings about fengshui. Szeto claimed that “orthodox” fengshui specialists charged people fixed prices and they did not charge people unusually high prices. For him, he charged at most 6-digit amounts for big firms and he said he had never seen a fengshui master charging people such an astronomical amount of money (Sing Pao, 2009:A03).

As for Yu, he regarded fengshui as a discipline similar to mathematics or physics as they developed based on their own basic theories. It was not a superstition and it had its own limitations. In contrast to Szeto Fat-ching who had experiences in doing rituals for his clients to restore their health, Yu thought it was too exaggerated to say fengshui could help people restoring life (Sing Pao, 2009a:A03). As a fengshui expert testified for Tony Chan, Joseph Yu had formal training in physics and mathematics at the University of Hong Kong in 1960s and he acquired 90% of his fengshui knowledge by reading books (Fong and Tsui 2009a:City3). This unique background favoured Tony Chan’s side as Yu did not believed in any life restoring fengshui rituals. He pointed out in the court that fengshui was neither a science nor superstition. However, it had to be “reasonable” because all fengshui theories were based on the classics. Anything out of common sense or logic was not fengshui. In this case, Yu favored Tony Chan’s side by saying there was no such thing called fengshui will and this implied that the will Chan held was a real will. The judge ended his testimony soon after he started (Fong and Tsui 2009a:City3; Sing Pao, 2009b:A03). It

was generally understood that Yu's self-trained fengshui background did not convince the judge.

Another fengshui specialist of Nina Wang, Yu Chi-lun, pointed directly that Tony Chan was cheating as digging holes under different buildings did not equal to "planting a life base." He emphasized that a fengshui master had to travel from mountain to mountain to look for the auspicious spot for planting a life base. This act was an insult to other fengshui masters and tarnished the reputation of the fengshui industry (Oriental Daily 2009:A02). Also, Mak Ling-ling, an active fengshui master in media, said she received a lot of extra questions from the media and her clients as a result of Tony Chan. She tried to explain that fengshui masters were divided into two branches: rituals (術) and calculation (數). Mak herself belonged to the group of calculation, who did the fengshui consultation by observing the directions, environments and repositioning things and they did not do rituals. She thought that by giving the eight characters to this kind of fengshui masters people could see if their telling was accurate. For the fengshui masters of rituals, they did various rituals, made phylactery and so on to change one's fortune. Mak suggested that it would be difficult to judge whether the specialists of this kind was good or not. The efficacy depended on the master's skills, mental status, and the subjective feelings of the clients. At the same time, Mak emphasized that most of fengshui masters had fixed prices and she paid taxes every year (Mak 2009:A18).

Outsiders' Views

This case elevated public interest about fengshui, and fengshui became a hot topic in that period of time.

Beside the elements of sex and money in the case, different media kept giving

fengshui details of the case every day. In general, the media did not attack fengshui as a superstition as they consulted other fengshui specialists to comment on different testimonies or for further fengshui knowledge. What were described as superstitious were Nina Wang's behaviors. The reason for this was because of her massive actions of fengshui. In the news reports, there were a lot of numbers showing how much Wang had spent and done on fengshui. For example, she had dug more than one hundred holes in various properties of Chinachem and insides these holes, different kinds of things were found like coins, jade, photos, dolls, and even mooncakes. Wang also required her staff to follow the fengshui instruction for clothes. Moreover, she paid Tony Chan three time and 688 million dollars each for a fengshui ritual and almost two billion dollars in total. Her personal assistant suggested in the court that "688" was a lucky number. (Next Magazine 2009:A038-042; Apple Daily 2009b:A02). Where is the line drawn between general acceptable acts of fengshui and superstition? It can be explained by the example of vitamin C. Some people believe that vitamin C can help them to prevent getting or to treat a cold, although it is scientifically unjustified⁹. For most of the people who believe in the function of the vitamin, taking one or two vitamin C supplementation pills per days is common. Moreover, this act is generally acceptable by those non believers. However, if a person takes ten vitamin C pills a day plus massive consumption of food that are rich in vitamin C such as oranges and kiwi fruits, this act is then regarded as out of ordinary. Fengshui is like vitamin C and Nina Wang was just like the person who took a lot of vitamin C supplementation tablets. She did too much and went beyond the line, therefore she was regarded as superstitious.

Nina Wang's case and fengshui were popular topics among newspaper

⁹ The functions of vitamin C as preventing and treating cold were suggested in *Vitamin C and The Common Cold* written by Linus Pauling. However, different studies show that in general population vitamin C does not reduce the chance of getting a cold. Furthermore, there is no obvious proof that vitamin C helps shortening cold. The wide application of vitamin C supplementation by the public is unjustified (Public Library of Science 2005).

columns during the trials. Some might see it as a scandal that promoted improper values like superstition and effortless success through fengshui (cf. Ng 2009:A14). Some said Wang's obsession with fengshui ruined her reputation after her death (cf. Cheung 2009:E07). The ethics of the fengshui specialists were also discussed as making a story with a dead person for getting her fortune was not acceptable (cf. Chan 2009:P37).

Some people see this case as a chance to make more money. As "planting life bases" was mentioned in the court, a book publisher promoted a new book, edited by Yu Chi-lun, about it in the Hong Kong Book Fair 2009 (Takungpao 2009:A12). The legislative councilor representing tourism industry, Paul Tse, suggested establishing a fengshui street as a tourism spot to promote Hong Kong (Mingpao 2009e:B14). Stage comedians Jim Chim and Cheung Tat-ming each used this case in their performances. They teased Tony Chan and made fun of "fengshui will" and "digging holes" in their talk shows (Apple Daily 2009e:C06; Singtao Daily 2009b:D02).

Aftermath

On the 2nd of February 2010, the judge delivered a 326-page judgment of the case and the Chinachem Charitable Foundation won the battle. More than one hundred out of 326 pages of the judgment were the analysis about the signatures on the will that Tony Chan held. This was the main argument in the judgment and Nina Wang's signature on that will was found fake. In fact, not much of the judgment was about the fengshui aspect since the judge thought Wang regarded Chan as her fengshui master but Chan sought to hide his identity as fengshui specialist by revealing the sexual relationship between Wang and him. There was no confirmation concerning the existence of the fengshui will. With other considerations, the judge decided Chan lied

and the Wang family won the case (Apple Daily 2010:A02; Man 2010:City1).

After the judge's ruling, Tony Chan was arrested by the police for suspicion of forgery (South China Morning Post 2010: EDT1). In addition to changing his lawyers and other legal actions (Tsui 2010:City2), Chan sought help from another fengshui master, Yu Chi-lun, who planted a life base for Nina Wang helping her win the court case against Wang's father-in-law. Yu advertised a statement on *Mingpao* on 17th February 2010 entitled "The inner thoughts of a metaphysicist"¹⁰. In the statement, Yu claimed that he would not do anything against his conscience, even though the rewards were huge. He also advised "Mr. So-and-so" to do more merits to compensate his faults. Moreover, he called on other fengshui specialists not to take the case of Mr. So-and-so (Oriental Daily 2010:A10). In an interview, Yu revealed that two new clients consulted him before Chinese New Year and they brought a piece of paper with only a date and a time on it. Yu was told that the person with that date of birth got into legal troubles and he was asked plant a life base for this man to win a court case. The fengshui master immediately recognized the birth details belonging to Tony Chan, as Nina Wang showed him once in 2005 asking Yu if Chan and herself were compatible, and refused to take the case. Chan's representative tried to persuade Yu by offering a reward of one million dollars. Yu stood firm and asked them to leave. The other day they called Yu again and told him they would give him ten million dollars if he took the case. In order to get out of the complications, Yu decided to issue a statement in *Mingpao* newspaper explaining his position. A reporter of Next Magazine asked Yu if he had been asked to publish the statement to show the Wang family he did not betray them, but the statement reminded him money was not everything. Being determined and avoiding causing additional problems to the case, Yu thought publishing a

¹⁰ The original title in Chinese: "一個術數家之心聲".

statement was the right thing to do and he asked other fengshui masters not to take the case. He hoped his example would let the public know that not all fengshui specialists were greedy. He was responding not only to the Tony Chan's case, but also to other recent scandals involving metaphysicists such as the cases of *Maoshan* (茅山) master¹¹, of the fake Taoist¹² and of the "Exorcist"¹³, who were convicted in Hong Kong of obtaining sex and money from women by promising to be able to boost their luck or to exorcise. In the report, not only Yu Chi-lun but three other fengshui masters, who were well-known for planting life bases, were asked if they would help Tony Chan to plant the life base. Including Yu, three fengshui specialists stated that they would not take the case as Chan was immoral and the money was injustice. (Next Magazine 2010: A022-028).

The Discourse of Fengshui in Hong Kong

Nina Wang's case drew wide attention in Hong Kong and all over the world. One of the reasons was the fengshui element in it. Going through different news reports about the case, it is not difficult to find fengshui-related headlines, for example, "Nina Wang's firm belief in fung shui used against her" (Brieger and Fong 2009b) and "Fengshui masters revolved around Nina Wang"¹⁴ (Mingpao 2009f:A09). Fengshui

¹¹ A *Maoshan* master was convicted of deceiving a 19-year-old model into having sex with him as a kind of the "*Maoshan* rituals" for changing her luck. Having sexual intercourses nine times, the victim got pregnant and suspected the whole thing was a hoax so that she reported to the police. The master confirmed that he had sexual rituals with 5 to 6 other clients before (Apple Daily 2009g:A09; Mingpao 2010a:A03).

¹² The fake Taoist was a former People's Liberation Army officer and he plead guilty on tricking a middle-aged woman for sex and 1.55 million Hong Kong dollars for giving her *yang qi* (陽氣), or positive energy. According to the police investigation, there were more than 30 male and female suspected victims and two men involved in the case were still sought by the police (Mingpao 2010b:A02).

¹³ A 63-year-old "exorcist" and his girlfriend were charged for deceiving a 20-year-old student into sexual intercourse twice as a kind of "exorcism rituals" (Mingpao 2010c:A10).

¹⁴ The original headline in Chinese: "龔如心身邊 風水師團團轉."

suddenly became a hot topic among the Hong Kong public during the period of court hearings. Fengshui has been an ordinary thing to Hong Kong people and they did not seem to be surprised about the facts that a billionaire had consulted various fengshui specialists or that fengshui was applied in the headquarters of Chinachem. Most of the people in Hong Kong have a general idea about fengshui as something related to direction and environment, which are rarely involved with rituals. Almost all the famous fengshui specialists we often see on television do this kind of fengshui. What aroused people's curiosity in this case were some fengshui rituals or acts which were rarely heard of such as planting a life base, burning real money and writing fengshui will. However, after this case, people had known more about the use of fengshui with magical rituals (法科風水). These new fengshui practices made the case more attractive.

Although fengshui took a role in the case, love and sex were the crucial elements drawing Hong Kong people's attention. The relationship between Nina Wang and Tony Chan was always the focus, both in the court and in public discussion. Things like photos and video tapes, testimonies of how and when Wang and Chan started their "affairs", or what the two did when they were together were widely discussed. Evidence showing the relationship between Wang and Chan and their stories were actually at the center of the case. We could see people making fun of those extreme fengshui acts like digging fengshui holes and burning real money, but more people were concerned about what Tony Chan was to Nina Wang. The profession of Tony Chan did not really matter in this case. He could be a psychiatrist, an administrative staff or a gigolo; the romantic relationship between the once richest female in Asia and any man was enough to make it the headline news. Fengshui here was just the side element.

For Yu's story, it may simply be his own invention, designed to boost his reputation as a fengshui specialist by claiming that even Tony Chan has turned to him for help. Whether it is true or not, the interest in the story is revealing of the importance of fengshui in Hong Kong. The original announcement was published in *Mingpao* on the 17th February 2010, and it was reported on in *South China Morning Post*, *Mingpao*, *Oriental Daily* and *The Sun*, but ignored by other Hong Kong newspapers¹⁵. Probably to some of the media, this statement had no new value at all. However, it was the cover story of *Next Magazine*, one of the Hong Kong mass magazines that focuses on gossip and entertainment, on the 25th February 2010. In this sensational report, Yu re-emphasized the reason he refused to help Chan in return for a huge amount of money. Through his statement and interview, Yu was trying to set an example of a righteous fengshui specialist in front of the public and to create a better image of the fengshui industry for the Hong Kong society. After all, the public impression towards the fortune tellers was not a good one. In the survey about the most trusted people and professions conducted by *Reader's Digest* in October 2009, fortune tellers (算命師) ranked the last among 40 professions. Some people might think that the story of Tony Chan and Nina Wang and other cases related to various "masters" actually negatively affected the image of fortune tellers (Mingpao 2010d:A09). It seemed that Yu was attempting to save other fengshui masters from falling into the "stereotype" of fengshui masters.

As we can see from Nina Wang's case, fengshui is not more attractive than sex and love to the Hong Kong public. It is not seen as deviant and is just as normal as love as well as sex. Therefore, fengshui is widely accepted and is a part of the context in Hong Kong.

¹⁵ The search was done through WiseNews with the keywords as Yu Chi-lun and 俞志麟 in the period from 17 February to 1 March 2010 within the Hong Kong media.

Chapter 3 – Famous Fengshui Masters

Peter So Man-fung is a famous fengshui master in Hong Kong. He had been a guest co-host for some radio programs. He also hosted a series of television program teaching fengshui, face reading and palm reading and he guest-starred in movies. Most of the covers of his publications are his photos and people can see the advertisements of his books in MTR stations and on newspapers. Moreover, So gets interviewed by different newspapers and magazines and he has his follower club. In Hong Kong, there are some other fengshui specialists who act like celebrities just like So Man-fung. Apart from doing fengshui consultations for clients, they frequently show up on different media such as television and newspaper talking about both fengshui-related and non-fengshui related subjects. They also attract followers like other actors and singers. In the following chapter, how these famous fengshui specialists establish their images and business, and how they try to package fengshui will be discussed.

Celebrity-like Fengshui Masters

Gaining exposures in the media helps the fengshui masters establish names for themselves. Fengshui masters appearing on media is not new to Hong Kong people. In the 1970s, there was a radio program on the Commercial Radio Hong Kong hosted by a fengshui master Lam Chun (林真). He talked about face reading in the program and the audience could phone in and ask their questions. In the 1980s, there were different television programs with the main theme of fengshui and other types of divination hosted by fengshui masters. Sometimes fengshui masters were on various television shows as guest hosts of a section illustrating the knowledge and application of

fengshui. In those afternoon television shows, which were aimed at housewives, the fengshui masters also answered the phone-in questions and went to the audience's home to give fengshui consultation. They put their pictures on the covers of the annual fortune guides they wrote. Fengshui specialists have not been distant to Hong Kong people due to the occasional appearance on different media. However, the appearances or images that the fengshui specialists portrayed were more similar and generic. The fengshui masters of that generation have maintained their style until present (Figure 3.1 to Figure 3.3). Compared to the past situation, more and more personal elements about the fengshui masters can be found in their appearances in the media. People can recognize them easily as their images are different from the others (Figure 3.1 to Figure 3.3):



Figure 3.1 The book cover of the Lam Chun's 2010 fortune guide.¹⁶



Figure 3.2 The book cover of the Lam Kwok-hung's 2010 fortune guide.¹⁷



Figure 3.3 The book cover of the Song Siu-kwong's 2010 fortune guide.¹⁸

¹⁶ Picture taken from http://www.yesasia.com/global/%E6%9E%97%E7%9C%9F-%E8%99%8E%E5%B9%B4%E9%81%8B%E6%B0%A3/1021457846-0-0-0-zh_TW/info.html accessed on 10 November 2009.

¹⁷ Picture taken from http://www.yesasia.com/global/%E6%9E%97%E5%9C%8B%E5%A8%81%E8%99%8E%E5%B9%B4%E9%81%8B%E7%A8%8B/1021343161-0-0-0-zh_TW/info.html accessed on 10 November 2009.



Figure 3.4 The book cover of the So Man-fung's 2010 fortune guide.¹⁹



Figure 3.5 The book cover of the Mak Ling-ling's 2010 fortune guide.²⁰



Figure 3.6 The book cover of the Szeto Fat-ching's 2010 fortune guide.²¹

As it is mentioned above, So Man-fung is one of the well-known fengshui specialists that appears on various media all the time. From late 1990s to early 2000s, So was asked to be a guest co-host in the program of Commercial Radio 2 *Wa! Wa! Wa!* (嘩!嘩!嘩!打到嚟!) once a week. Singers and actors were invited to the program and So would predict their future for them. As the channel has been targeted on the young generation, So has been known by more young people. Moreover, gossip about the interviewed celebrities was mentioned in the program, and this drew attentions from the fans of the celebrities and other audience. So could gain extra

¹⁸ Picture taken from

http://www.yesasia.com/global/%E5%AE%8B%E9%9F%B6%E5%85%89%E8%99%8E%E5%B9%B4%E9%81%8B%E7%A8%8B/1021375110-0-0-0-zh_TW/info.html accessed on 10 November 2009.

¹⁹ Picture taken from <http://www.masterso.com/book/book.php> accessed on 10 November 2009.

²⁰ Picture taken from

http://www.yesasia.com/global/%E9%BA%A5%E7%8E%B2%E7%8E%B22010%E5%B9%B4%E8%99%8E%E5%B9%B4%E9%81%8B%E7%A8%8B/1021292890-0-0-0-zh_TW/info.html accessed on 10 November 2009.

²¹ Picture taken from

http://www.yesasia.com/global/%E5%8F%B8%E5%BE%92%E6%B3%95%E6%AD%A3%E8%99%8E%E5%B9%B4%E9%81%8B%E7%A8%8B/1021489758-0-0-0-zh_TW/info.html accessed on 10 November 2009.

exposure when the newspapers and magazines reported the interviews. At the same time, the radio program host Sandra Ng always teased So's long ponytail and half bald head so that she gave him a nickname M-forehead (M字額). Therefore, his close relationship with celebrities and his unique appearance helped him to establish his image.

Apart from radio programs, So Man-fung also takes parts in television shows. Beyond the level of taking part in afternoon programs for housewives or minimum appearance in explaining other cases, So hosted a series called *Feng Shui Lecture of Master So* (「峰」生水起精讀班) on Cable Television and its style was different from the rest. From 2006 to 2008, four seasons had been aired. The first two were about fengshui and the latter two were about face reading and palm reading respectively. Before the program, So first openly recruited some interested audience to be his students. On the program, So gave lectures to the students. For the seasons about fengshui, some audiences' houses were taken as their case studies. So and his students would discuss and solve their problems on television. So would tease those students who could not answer his questions correctly and for the other seasons, students would be eliminated if they did not perform well in the shows. As there were many people who wanted to be his students, it could tell others that he was very popular and hence reassured his ability in fengshui.

Beside programs related to fengshui, So Man-fun hosted a series of travel show *Sei Sap Jat Fung Kwong Taan Sai Gaai* ²²(40日「峰」狂歡世界), which was aired from November 2007 to February 2008 on Cable TV's entertainment channel. For this 13-episode series, So and his co-host, Priscilla Wong, went to visit nine countries in four continents including Europe, Africa, South America and Asia within forty days.

²² Literally means "Fung enjoys the world in 40 days".

As for the reason why a fengshui master had this idea of making a travel show, So Man-fung mentioned in an interview “I am bored by shooting programs about metaphysics. I suggested making a program about me travelling” (Lok 2008:D03)²³. When So was asked if he had done any divination for the safety of the trip, he said “I don’t believe in this. For people who believe in fate, they tend to believe ‘the plans of man cannot compare to the plans of heaven’ more.”²⁴ He would keep producing shows with Cable Television because he wanted to promote metaphysics through this (Lok 2008:D03). In fact, his image of a travel lover attracted a publisher and So became a representative of a series of travel guide books.



Figure 3.7 Front cover of the travel guide of Seoul published by the Sky Publishing



Figure 3.8 Back cover of the travel guide of Seoul published by the Sky Publishing

²³ The original text: 「做玄學節目都做到悶啦，我就話不如拍我去旅行！」

²⁴ The original text: 「我哋唔信呢啲嘢嘅！因為愈信命嘅人，就愈相信『人算不如天算』呢句說話。」 (Lok 2008:D03)



Figure 3.9 Enlarged picture of So Man-fung's photo on the front cover.



Figure 3.10 Enlarged picture of So Man-fung's photo on the back cover.

To see if a person is interested by the public, the frequency of appearance on newspapers and magazines would be an index. So Man-fung draws quite a lot of attention as a fengshui master. People can see him sometimes on the entertainment page of the newspapers and celebrity news magazines. As So loves clubbing, the reports about him going to the pubs in Lan Kwai Fong²⁵ are not foreign to the readers. Furthermore, in-depth interviews with So Man-fung can also be found in some magazines. In those interviews, So was asked not only questions about fengshui, but also about his personal life such as his hobbies, his romance, his financial status and so on. Through different interviews, he establishes an image of adventurous and high rolling. Also, he is sometimes seen as arrogant and he does not mind showing off his hundreds of millions of assets or his frame "I am not a trouble maker, I am just especially famous. Whoever get involved with my name will become famous... I have

²⁵ Lan Kwai Fong is an area located in Central, Hong Kong with many pubs, restaurants and clubs.

only one hundred of million dollars of assets? I have gone beyond that long ago”²⁶ (Wong 2007:P34). In addition, criticizing other famous fengshui masters in Hong Kong reinforces his arrogant style. When So was asked about the sale of his fortune guide book in 2008 and was compared to the publications of other three fengshui masters, he said “You always compare me with these three (other famous fengshui masters). They can compare within themselves. I am not in the same level as them. To be frank, they cannot beat me in the coming five years. But I am not sure about five years later because I think I am getting lazier and lazier (Sudden Weekly 2008:SW058).”²⁷ It seems that his haughty speech does not affect his image. On the contrary, people know his arrogant attitude and this makes him standing out from other famous fengshui specialists.

An evidence to show whether one is famous is the fans. So Man-fung has his Peter So Student Union (蘇民峰學生會)²⁸. It is an organization formed by So's students with an objective to spread So's ideas on metaphysics and to promote the right spirit of metaphysics. The union can help unite the students of So and provide a chance for them to learn from each other. Moreover, the students can try to apply their fengshui knowledge during activities. The members of the union are the students of So or of So's students. New members have to pay two hundred dollars for the registration and the annual fee for every member is six hundred dollars. Regular activities like talks and seminars are held to discuss So Man-fung's fengshui theories and applications. The union also organizes many courses about face readings, eight characters knowledge and other divinations, which are taught by the senior students of

²⁶ The original text: 「我唔係多是非，係特別出名啫，邊個人掂我個名都紅...身家點只得一億？一早就過咗啦」

²⁷ The original text: 「你哋成日將我同佢哋三個比，佢哋比咪得囉，我同佢哋都唔同級數。老實講，佢哋五年之內都有可能鍊贏我，五年之後我唔敢包，因為我覺得自己愈嚟愈懶。」

²⁸ The website of Peter So Student Union <http://www.pssu.org/>.

So. Apart from the classroom activities, the members of the student union have parties and gatherings with So Man-fung once a while and they even had parties at So's luxurious house at Ting Kau. The most special event they held was that they rented a stall at the Lunar New Year Fair for the past few years and did face readings and palm readings for the visitors. The money they earned through the divinations was donated to different charity organizations such as Hong Kong Red Cross and Orbis. At the stalls, the publications of So were sold as well. Furthermore, on the website of Peter So Student Union, there is a list showing the upcoming functions that So is going to participate in or when the members can see So on television. In fact, we can find this organization resembles other celebrities' fan clubs even though they name the group as "student union". Here we can take Andy World Club²⁹ (華仔天地), the fan club of Andy Lau³⁰, as a comparison. The club has been set up with the purpose to unite Andy Lau's fans and the membership fee for Hong Kong fans is two hundred and thirty dollars per year. It organizes two major events every year, anniversary of the fan club and the birthday of Lau, as well as other irregular gatherings so that the fans can get close to their idol. Moreover, the club holds various interest classes like calligraphy, *tai chi* and yoga in order to spread Andy Lau's studious spirit and to allow the fans enhance themselves. On the other hand, the fans take part in various social services and charity donations such as Giving Warm Knit Activity [sic] and Walkathon for St. James Settlement³¹. Information about Andy Lau's upcoming projects and functions can also be found on the website of the club. From this, we can see that So's "student union" and a celebrity's fan club are very similar.

²⁹ The website of AndyWorld Club <http://www.awc618.com/>.

³⁰ Andy Lau (劉德華) is a Hong Kong celebrity who is famous for singing and acting in Hong Kong and other Asian countries.

³¹ St. James Settlement is a social service provider in Hong Kong. Their service targets include the elderly, youth, disabled and so on.

In contrast to So Man-fung's haughty image, Mak Ling-ling, another famous fengshui specialist in Hong Kong, presents herself as more approachable (親切). By "approachable" I mean Mak does not place herself at a place above other people. So Man-fung always think he is the best in the Hong Kong fengshui industry, for example, he has claimed that his fortune guide is the best seller, and he also told the reporters the other fengshui masters are not in the same level as him. Moreover, the TV shows Mak did were not something like *Feng Shui Lecture of Master So*. First, people do not have to compete to be Mak's students Second, Mak's role on the shows are usually small and can be filled by other specialists, but Mak is still willing to take part in these small roles. One of my fengshui master informants said "approachable" personality as Mak Ling-ling's selling point. "She always wears a smile, she appears to be nice, she is not weird type...Her approachable image helps her to be a more convincing fengshui master...Being persuasive is crucial to fengshui specialists."

Instead of having her own television programs, Mak Ling-ling shows up at a lot of diverse television shows like afternoon shows for housewives, games shows, and different programs about metaphysics on different channels. Through these chances of cooperating with other celebrities, Mak seems to have established good relationships with them because we can see a lot of photos of her with singers and actors³². By frequently appearing in front of the camera, she displays her skills and professionalism. Her frequent appearance on various media is a sign to show how popular she is, and furthers her fame and popularity.

In addition, Mak Ling-ling rapped in the song *Fung Sang Seoi Hei*³³

³² Mak Ling-ling's blog <http://vipblog.orientalsunday.hk/lingling/>.

³³ The music video can be seen at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwzPrc_Gk5o&feature=PlayList&p=B4145DC2D2149247&playnext=1&playnext_from=PL&index=45.

(風生水起) sung by the rap and hip hop group FAMA (農夫) in 2007. The song was full of elements of metaphysics. The lyrics can be divided into three parts. The first part points out that people have different destinies. For example, the lyrics of the first verse

Min is the first, *yun* is the second and
fengshui is the third
people have ups and downs

一命二運三風水

人有三衰六旺

...

Why was he born with a golden key?
And why is my house smaller than his
toilet?

...

究竟點解佢出世嗰時含住條金鎖匙
又點解我成間屋仲細過佢個坐廁

...

Is it because I was born in the hours of
*hai*³⁴?

...

係咪我出事 出世喺亥時

actually show that people are born to have different opportunities and fates. As for the second part of the song, Mak Ling-ling raps solo and the lyrics of this part shows Mak's skills:

I have known Plum Blossom Oracle
since I was born.

我一出世就識睇梅花易數

Of course I can clearly tell the
directions East, South, West, North
as I have used the fengshui compass
for twenty years.

用咗廿年羅庚東南西北梗係分到

I can do palm reading and also face
reading.

我掌又睇到 相又睇到

Rapping is not a difficulty for me at
all.

要 Rap 都完全冇難度

It is a section for Mak to sell her professional skills as a fengshui specialist. Moreover, the part of the song is a verse sung like a question and answer section. The two

³⁴ The hours of *hai* (亥時) is one of the twelve earthly branches (地支), which represents the hours between nine to eleven p.m. In Cantonese, the pronunciation of 亥 is the same as that of 害, which means trouble and harm. Therefore, the phrase "born in the hours of *hai*" is used to describe people born with bad luck and troubles.

members of FAMA ask Mak different personal questions about their romance and career development and Mak gives them various suggestions. The song was widely played in radio, television and even on the bus. Mak Ling-ling was asked if she wanted to change her job, she said “In fact I want to try different things, you can ask me to cook. They are just different ways to understand metaphysics” (Apple Daily 2007a:E15)³⁵. On the other hand, it seems that Mak has defended for her profession through this song. In early 2007, Mak Ling-ling shot a segment of a television program *Jan Git Dei Ling* (人傑地靈) for TVB Jade and it was found that Mak made a mistake during reading the fengshui compass as she said “South”, which was actually “North”. This was reported by magazines and newspapers and Mak’s fenghui knowledge proficiency was criticized and Mak claimed she just said it wrong (Apple Daily 2007b:C10). In an interview, Mak claimed that her student C Kwan, a member of FAMA, invited her to cooperate on the song and she agreed immediately. She even took part in writing the lyrics and tried to use it to defend herself over the incident (Takungpao 2007:C02). It seems that the following lyrics addressed towards Mak’s critics:

Of course I can clearly tell the directions East, South, West, North as I have used the fengshui compass for twenty years.

...

It is important to see the fengshui compass right.

It does not matter how others talk about you.

用咗廿年羅庚東南西北梗係分到

...

羅庚最緊要睇得啱

人哋點樣講你都好閒

Moreover, Mak Ling-ling seems to draw a lot of attention from different businesses as people can see her attending public functions or on different

³⁵ The original text: 「其實我好多嘢都想試，叫我煮食亦可以。只不過係以不同方式參透玄學。」

advertisements for various products. One of them is property developers because the good fengshui can be a selling point. Henderson Land Development, a land developer in Hong Kong, made an advertisement with nine fengshui specialists, including Mak Ling-ling, to promote the then-newly built luxurious housing estate The Beverly Hills³⁶. In the approximately three-minute advertisement, each master said different things about the location, environment and design of the estate to show the fengshui of it was good for various aspects of people and this kind of housing location is rare in Hong Kong. Mak was the last one shown in the advertisement making her statement that people living there would become richer and richer. In fact, it is not only the developers in Hong Kong inviting Mak or other fengshui specialists for promotions of properties; the developers in mainland China also ask Hong Kong famous fengshui masters to sell their estates by organizing fengshui seminars. Mak said she was invited to do these seminars for different estates in mainland “Ha, this is easy money, usually I get tens of thousands per hour, I sometimes do two seminars in one day” (Hong Kong Economic Times 2008b:D03).³⁷

Fengshui master are not limited to sell fengshui-related products or to do the jobs about fengshui and Mak Ling-ling is enthusiastic to do such things. For example, she has been invited to be the representative for a slimming centre. Mak claimed that the reward of this job, 500,000 dollars, would be all donated to the charity. She also said that there were some other similar company asking her for being representatives in the past but she did not accept because she was afraid that wearing bathing suits, shorts and vest for the advertisements would affect her professional image. However, the one she is representing allows her to wear her suits for the commercial so as to maintain her image (Tong 2009:C04). Furthermore, Mak was invited to do a stage

³⁶ The advertisement can be watched at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWASyZuH09o>.

³⁷ The original text: 「哈，都幾好搵，通常一個鐘收幾萬銀，有時一日走兩場。」

drama with DJs of the Commercial Radio Hong Kong in November 2009. She played the first girlfriend of Sammy Leung, a famous DJ in Hong Kong, in the show. In the performance, Mak wore her own suits and used her Hermes handbag as a prop (Apple Daily 2009h:C10).

From the media appearances of Mak Ling-ling, we can see that she clearly drew a line to show her professional and yet approachable image, no matter in what circumstances. She insisted on wearing her suits in various situations like television shows, movie, and even her music video and in the stage drama. This creates a sense of professionalism for her. At the same time, the frequent appearances in both big and small events help her to establish a more approachable image.

Difference from the Past

Stephan Feuchtwang mentioned that fengshui was not treated as a profession and fengshui specialists were seen as guests to their clients as they were returned with money, presents and hospitality for consultations (Feuchtwang [1974] 1982), we can see from the examples of famous fengshui experts in Hong Kong that this situation has changed.

Famous fengshui masters in Hong Kong try to promote themselves through exposure on media while the ordinary ones, or the “traditional” ones, do not do that. Most of my fengshui master informants claimed that they have been invited by the television stations to be the guests on some shows, but they always refused for different reason. Apart from one of my fengshui master informants insists that orthodoxy specialist do not do self promotion, the others have no problems with fengshui and self promotion. One of the reasons they do not go on TV is that they are afraid of showing incapability in front of the public. Wong Lai, or Auntie Lai, a

middle-aged female fengshui master informant of mine told me

Sometimes it is very difficult to explain things by only a few words. You know the time for these shows is very limited. If you just make generalization, it can be wrong and affect people who have really listened to you. Then people may also think you are wrong... I am not really good at talking. I am afraid that I cannot respond to all the questions they ask on the show...I am not pretty enough to go on television.

Indeed, making a mistake on a television program can be dramatic, even though the mistake is small. The example of Mak Ling-ling's wrong reading of fengshui compass can be a warning and cynical comments about the incident were given by some of my interviewees. Another informant, Victoria Chim, a young fengshui specialist in her early 30s, thought she has still has not reached the level of being on TV shows, implying that she was worried she was not good enough. "I want to go step by step and I want to give others an impression of being reliable." In addition, getting on TV and being famous can be harmful. It can lead to all kinds of challenges. Ronald Kwong had such an experience "I had helped a gang member before and the experience scared me (see Chapter 4)...Once you are famous, you will get customers from more diverse backgrounds. You may get more risks." Another reason for not going on TV can be related to money. By going to the shows, the masters only get several hundred dollars of transportation allowance. To my informants, the amount of money is too small, so that they see it as them paying for promotion and a waste of time. Although some specialists do not do media promotion, it seems clear that promotion and marketing strategies help fengshui specialists get famous and hence brings two benefits: 1) establishing a professional image through exposure; 2) attracting more potential customers as they go beyond the oral recommendations of existing clients and let more people know about them.

From the examples in the previous paragraphs, the establishment of fengshui

specialists' images depends on their appearances and the programs they participate. First, from older generation to current generation of famous fengshui masters, they usually wear formal suits in the publicity. Mak Ling-ling has been firm on this as she insisted to wear her suits for shooting advertisement and performing on stage. This creates a sense of professionalism. On the other hand, the projects they work on definitely affect their images. Like the television lectures hosted by So Man-fung teaching fengshui and other divinations, this is a way to set up the image of "a fengshui expert who is qualified to teach the disciplines". A more "professional" example was that Szeto Fat-ching, who represented Chinachem in Nina Wang's case, provided his expertise on the court. These show that fengshui masters can be as professional as other occupations.

Beside establishing images and introducing themselves through the participation on the media, the "modern" fengshui masters, unlike the ordinary fengshui specialists who gain their reputations and hence expand their businesses through their existing clients can let people or the potential customers, approach them without any personal referrals. As there is no middleman, the internet helps to enhance these famous fengshui specialists' the popularity and approachability. They make use of personal websites, blogs and facebook to help their self promotion and communicate with their potential clients or fans. In these masters' websites, the contact numbers and addresses are the crucial elements. In addition, a profile about the master is usually found on the websites telling people when they started their career as fengshui specialists and what kinds of jobs they have taken. This is a way to show how "experienced" they are. Since these things are promotional, a list of services offered is often shown. Prices of the services are provided in some sites. Since the ordinary fengshui masters get their business through personal networks, they have a higher

chance to get “red packets” instead of formal payments after giving consultations. The amount of money of these red packets is flexible, depending on how close the clients are with the masters, the services they receive, or other factors. Although there is no standard for pricing services in the industry, the price lists on the websites can be a guide for the customers. Furthermore, the publications of these masters are listed out. This can be a sign to show their ability since there is no objective qualification for the fengshui masters. The more books you write, the more “qualified” you are. Some even post their notes or articles about metaphysics on their pages to show they are “knowledgeable” (since the act of putting the notes or articles online is to show how much they know about the discipline and to “prove” they are insiders of the industry. It seems that it is a way to show they are professional fengshui specialists). Browsing through these websites, the most unexpected thing is that So Man-fung provides online services. Fengshui consultation, face reading and other divinations can be done online. The clients only need to send the floor plan and photos of the property, or their own photos, together with the questions and personal details to So’s office, and So will reply to the clients by email. However, it seems that not all specialists accept the idea of online consultation. One of my fengshui teachers said in class:

It is important for a fengshui specialist to do two things [other than focusing on the interior setting] when he or she gives a consultation: sees the external environment and uses a fengshui compass... If the master does not use a fengshui compass, how can the exact direction of the apartment can be known?

There is a fengshui master [implies So Man-fung] asking his clients to take some pictures and he gives fengshui advice based on those photos. It does not make sense. He cannot see the outer environment of the property and he cannot know what direction it faces accurately. If the direction is not accurate, how can you give accurate suggestions to the customers?

In fact, criticism of the efficacy of online fengshui consultation and of the specialist who provides this service came up sometimes during my interviews with various

fengshui masters. Most of them had similar views as my fengshui teacher. Cynical remarks were also given to this situation like “He [So Man-fung] is famous, but does it mean that he is so powerful and he can know the fengshui without looking at the real environment?” On the other hand, online fengshui consultation is not a unique idea of one particular specialist. Some customers actually ask for it. Auntie Lai told me about such clients.

Some overseas Chinese clients asked me if I could give fengshui consultations if they sent me some pictures. Of course I said no... They [the clients] had changed their names before. They emailed or called to give me their personal information and I picked a new name for them. Name changing and picking dates can be done in this way but not fengshui. It is impossible to know the real environment of those places. I do not do online fengshui consultation in Hong Kong, let alone Canada and Australia.

It seems that the format of how the fengshui service is delivered has changed due to the technology development.

Fengshui as A Science?

Some famous fengshui specialists mentioned in various interviews that they wanted to promote fengshui as a science. The superstar fengshui master So Man-fung said he wanted to popularize fengshui in a younger way (年青化). He believes fengshui is a science that is all about calculation and has nothing to do with religion and superstition (New Monday 2006:54). On the other hand, he thinks the popularization of fengshui in Hong Kong was started long before 1997 and it was related to science. “It was not because Hong Kong people became superstitious after the handover of Hong Kong, but because the fengshui masters of the newer generation are more liberal, their arguments are more about scientific evidence and that is why they can get the public acceptance easily” (Apple Daily 2007c:A13)³⁸. Another

³⁸ The original text: 「唔係因為回歸後港人迷信，而係新一代命理學家作風比較開明，立論比較

famous fengshui master, Lee Shing-chak (李丞責) tried to make fengshui a science by obtaining a doctorate degree in Astrophysics at the Beijing Normal University (Singtao Daily 2009b:E02). He also foresaw the development of the fengshui industry “Fengshui succeeded in becoming entertaining. The next step is to make it a science. Although modern people are more liberal than before, many people still think fengshui is a kind of superstition” (Eastweek 2009: B092-098)³⁹. He also suggested what the next generation should do to achieve the goal “what the next generation should do...try to integrate the western techniques we learn into metaphysics, to make it more science” (Eastweek 2009: B092-098)⁴⁰. Lee’s goal is shared by another well-known fengshui specialist Alion Yeo (楊天命) “I hope to change the public prejudice toward metaphysics, let the people know the function of this long-standing Chinese science. It is definitely not superstition” (Lime 2008:P105)⁴¹.

In fact, through promoting fengshui as a science to the public, these masters build up and display the systematic side of the practice, which makes fengshui look more convincing. This would benefit the industry of fengshui, both fengshui itself and the masters. More positive images can be established.

講究科學根據，容易得到大眾接納。」

³⁹ The original text: 「成功把玄學娛樂化了，下一步就是把它科學化，雖然現代人已經比以往開明，不過仍然有很多人認為風水屬迷信的一種。」

⁴⁰ The original text: 「下一代該做的...試著把我們學到的西方技術融入玄學，使之更加科學化。」

⁴¹ The original text: 「我希望改變大眾對玄學的偏見，讓大認識這門源遠流長的中國科學也有實際功用，絕非導人迷信。」

Chapter 4 – Ordinary Fengshui Masters

Fengshui specialists in Hong Kong are mysterious. By “mysterious” I am not referring to the existence of the fengshui masters in Hong Kong society. Hong Kong people are aware that there are people with fengshui knowledge and these people may earn their livings on it. Therefore, the existence of fengshui specialists is never a question. However, unlike the famous masters who appear in different media all the time to tell their own stories or to sell themselves as efficacious metaphysicists, the ways ordinary fengshui specialists learn about fengshui, establish their career, and how they operate their business are not clear to many people. This is one of the mysterious sides of these masters. At the same time, what the specialists deal with are usually the life mysteries of their clients. Why does my entire family get sick at the same time? Why did a series of unlucky incidents happen to me? How can I improve my luck for gaining wealth? Of course people can consult medical doctors, actuaries or financial planners separately for these questions. The metaphysicists would be an alternative to get all these life mysteries solved. In this chapter, I am going to discuss how the ordinary fengshui specialists learn and become who they are, and how they run their business.

Becoming a Fengshui Master

How does a person become a fengshui specialist? Most of my informants points out that this question is not a right question because they do not see themselves as solely fengshui specialists but *seot sou si* (術數師) or *jyun hok gaa* (玄學家)⁴², or

⁴² *Seot sou* 術數 is a general term for chinese prophecy. *Jyun hok* 玄學 can be translated as metaphysics. In the interviews, my informants did not distinguish these two items.

metaphysicists. Different informants have their own paths of becoming a fengshui master, or metaphysicists. In the following part, several stories are illustrated.

Richard Yu is in his late 40s and made fun of himself by calling himself a *fengshui lo* (風水佬)⁴³. About his experience in pursuing the knowledge of fengshui, Yu said it started with a coincidence.

My teacher was introduced to me by a friend. I first met him when I went hiking with my friend. At first I thought he was just an ordinary old man. I chatted with my friend about landscapes and fengshui in that hiking trip. At that time the old man heard of our conversation and asked me if I was afraid of ghosts. He invited me to a night hiking. In that hiking, we observed stars and he talked a lot about astrology. Later on, he asked me to follow him [to learn *seot sou*].

I met a good teacher [the old man], who taught in a vivid way.

Richard's teacher did not live long and Richard accredited the tutor for bringing a great impact on him, on both learning and career. A part of the reasons why Richard gave up his last job and became a full time fengshui master was because of his teacher's suggestion.

I had been working as a clerical officer in the government for seven years. However, it was boring. That was why I changed to work in foreign exchange. I worked in the field for fifteen years and I found that the people in the field were philistine and cold-blooded. They only cared about money and benefits. I was so frustrated about that. I got up when the New Zealand stock market started and I slept four hours a day as I needed to keep an eye on the market. My teacher suggested me to make a living with my skills. At first I was a part-time fengshui master in order to gain some more experience. I did not get pay and I kept asking my client if the setting worked or not. Later on, my master suggested me to work as a full time specialist. I found that I could help more people by this.

I am 48 years old. When I was first started to be a fengshui master ten years ago, I was asked by a client when I arrived "where is your master [teacher]?" I was thought to be an assistant as I looked young. People think fengshui masters are always middle age men.

However, this was the side described by Richard himself. My other informants told me that the failures of both marriage and career were the hidden reasons why he gave up his previous job and became a full time fengshui master, about ten years ago, in the

⁴³ A Cantonese slang of fengshui specialist.

1997 financial crisis. The financial industry, in which Richard was working at that time, was shaken. Richard's personal investment had been greatly affected as he lost a huge amount of money in the financial economic downturn. At the same time, his marriage failed and his wife wanted a divorce. Frustrated with the whole situation, Richard left the financial industry and started a new life. Becoming a full time fengshui specialist was a way to earn a living.

It seems that failures in career have changed more than one person's life. Luk Yiu has become a full time metaphysicist since 2002 because of the closure of his factory.

I had started to be a part-time metaphysicist since 1988 as I owned a garment factory in Hong Kong at that time. In 2002, due to the demolition of the building, I decided not to continue my factory. Since then I have become a full time metaphysicist.

From owning a garment factory to moving into a 200-square foot apartment in a public housing estate, Luk justified his low economic status by being an orthodox metaphysicist.

In the past, there was no particular knowledge called fengshui or face reading. These were all under *seot sou*... people learning *seot sou* had to choose one of the following three: being alone, dying young or being poor. People usually did not choose the first one as it implies having no children. Also, people did not select dying young. It is pointless if you die right after you have finished learning the knowledge. Therefore, most of the people picked being poor. That was why the metaphysicists in the past worked for the rich, in return for living places and food.

I learn orthodox *seot sou* and I have chosen to be poor. Orthodox *seot sou* masters do not do any promotions or advertisements... it is difficult for a full time metaphysicist to survive in the market if you do not do any promotions. Without advertisements, how do you let others know you? For me, my clients are the friends or relatives of other clients.

Apart from the miserable experiences, curiosity can be a reason why some people learn the knowledge about fengshui. Ronald Kwong is one of the cases. He is now in his 40s and he began learning face reading through reading books when he was eighteen years old. The starting point of his pursuit of the knowledge started from his

interest in keeping ghosts, or *joeng gwai zai* (養鬼仔)⁴⁴.

At the time *joeng gwai zai* was a popular topic and I was interested in it. I wanted to know what it was about. Moreover, I was curious about *man mai* (問米)⁴⁵, medium, and everything in the spiritual world. Therefore I tried to find my answer through reading and I came across a book about face reading. It was interesting and reinforced my curiosity. Coincidentally, one of my friends wanted to go take the course about this knowledge at that time and hence I went with him.

Since then, Kwong kept taking different classes of various metaphysicists. They took from a few months to about a year. Within fifteen years, Kwong had learned from twelve fengshui metaphysicists and some of them were the famous masters who often appeared on television programs or whose publications were sold in many places like book stores, convenient stores and newspaper stalls. In fact, he started to do fortune telling after the first two years of learning.

At first I did fortune telling for my friends for fun. Surprisingly my friends thought what I said was accurate. They told their friends about that, which helped me to build up my reputation and market, and it started my career of metaphysicist... I did not do fengshui consultation at the beginning. I had spent a long time to learn fengshui because it is not that easy. It took a lot of time for me to try and practise.

It was twelve years ago that he became a full time metaphysicist. Before that, he was working in a public utility in Hong Kong. To most of the people, his previous job was a stable and well-paid job. Why did Kwong give it up to become a full time fengshui master?

There were two reasons for my resignation of the previous job. Firstly, my job was getting harder and harder and the working atmosphere was unbearable. Second, I was inspired by one of my clients. When I did fortune telling for him, he asked me "Did you do the fortune telling for yourself?" I went back home and calculated for myself. Then I found out I was going to have a calamity or sickness. It was reflected from my calculation. As for my body, there were some symptoms like gum bleeding. I knew I would have cancer. My father died of cancer and I was in a high risk. From my calculation, the only solution to this calamity was to avoid touching metals.

⁴⁴ It is believed that keeping ghost or *joeng gwai zai* is a kind of magic which the ghost works for or help its "master" to change the fortune.

⁴⁵ *Man mai* is a way to communicate with the spirits through the medium.

Therefore, I gave up my job, which required me to use a lot of tools, and sold my car. Of course I consulted my doctor at the same time. Since I had no job to support my living including the medical expenses, I had no way but became a full time fengshui master to earn my living.

Among my informants of fengshui masters, Victoria Chim is an exceptional case. She is in her early 30s and she did not go through the learning process which others experienced or the inspiration of being a fengshui master. She was born to be a fengshui master. Fengshui is a knowledge that has been passed on in her family. Her grandfather was the first fengshui master in the family and he passed the knowledge to his son, Victoria's father. Victoria's father has passed the knowledge to his two daughters, Victoria and her sister, and set up a metaphysics learning centre in Hong Kong ten years ago. She described her life in a fengshui masters' family:

My grandfather was a fengshui master but I do not know from where he learnt it... Learning fengshui is a natural thing for me. I did not nurture this as an interest. It is just like you learn the alphabet when you go to kindergarten. I knew all celestial stems and earthly branches when I was in kindergarten. Metaphysics is a part of our life, just like watching television and eating... I first read those fengshui classics when I was a child but I did not understand at all. I started to understand what the books meant when I was in secondary school.

However, Victoria did not become a full time fengshui master after graduation. Majoring in interior design, she works in a design company in the day time and she works as a fengshui master in the spare time. Most of her colleagues do not know her identity of fengshui specialist and she does not intend to apply her knowledge in her work. She explained:

I know my position very well. I am just an employee in the company. I do not comment on the design which obviously violates the fengshui rules. However, I may unconsciously use fengshui knowledge on the part I work on. You know, colours, shapes, materials are all related to fengshui. It is difficult to avoid using my knowledge completely.

My job provides me with stable pay so that I can choose what fengshui cases I want to do. If I live on fengshui, I will have no freedom in selecting the clients or cases because it is my only money income... I still want to accumulate more experience in the field [design] and I will probably still be working in the design industry for the coming ten years.

Victoria's fengshui knowledge is not usually applied to her daytime job but her own fengshui business. Apart from teaching and helping out in her father's fengshui learning centre, she also has her own fengshui clients. Is there any competition or comparison within the family? Victoria has her own view on this.

Our target clients are different. Most of my clients are below forty years old. For those middle age people, they usually look for my father or my sister. Also, the cases I have are usually in a smaller scale like the shops and houses in Hong Kong. My father's business is not limited in Hong Kong. He goes to mainland China all the time for surveying fengshui of factories and offices... I teach in his [Victoria's father] centre sometimes. Usually the students would see me as another student at first because I do not look like a fengshui specialist. They all think a fengshui master must be a middle age person. Furthermore, some of them doubt that I am qualified to teach since I am pretty young. Usually these doubts would be overcome by the family reputation... I do not see there is any comparison or competition between me and my father or my sister. I think our relationship is more like a complementary one... Sometimes when I am lazy or busy, I ask my sister to take my clients.

Growing up in a fengshui family, Victoria has asked her father a question that many people have asked her.

When I was small, I asked my father if he taught me the knowledge only because he had no son. He replied me "you have asked a stupid question". When I was older, I realized that my father has taught me and my sister all he knows, without holding back.

She emphasizes that her family is not special and they live like other Hong Kong people but she admits the knowledge of metaphysic is a part of her life: "I read the Chinese almanac to pick a suitable day for haircut". Not many people in Hong Kong pick an auspicious day from the calendar before they go to the hairdresser. Her emphasis of being "normal" actually reflects her special habit of being a fengshui master.

Born to be a metaphysicist can be rare. However, being part time fengshui specialists like Victoria are not unusual. Among my informants, there are two other cases of amateur fengshui masters, who have their own full time jobs but giving people

fengshui consultations in their spare time.

Brian Poon is working as a driver for the Hong Kong Government. At the same time, he is an amateur fengshui specialist. His interest in fengshui started in his twenties and he learnt it through books. As he has a relative who is a fengshui master in his hometown in mainland China, he started to learn the knowledge from this relative. To him, he sees fengshui as a skill and knowledge to help himself and his friends and he does not regard it as a way to earn money.

My clients are actually my friends and colleagues, or their friends. Giving them fengshui advice is like doing a favour. To me, it is not a kind of business. I do not ask them to pay but they usually give me red packets. Even though I am not a full time fengshui master, many people invite me to give fengshui consultation for them, especially around Lunar New Year... I am a lazy person and I am satisfied with my current situation. Learning fengshui is a way to help myself and my friends. It works.

Brian thought that his full time job let him have more opportunities to practise his fengshui skills when he started to learn it.

About ten to fifteen years ago, I always took advantage of being a driver and went to my co-workers' homes to survey fengshui. For example, I knew I was ordered to go to a place where my colleague lived nearby. I would sneak to his house for an hour to check fengshui for him. This was the beginning of my life as a part time fengshui specialist. Now the media and the public monitor the civil servants very close. I dare not do it now. Instead, I give fengshui consultation to my friends after work.

Through these practices, Brian gained a reputation in his office. Many co-workers asked him for consultations. However, some of them made him mad.

There was a manager in my office asking me for fengshui advice. I had helped him several times and then he got promoted. However, he did not say "thank you" or not even contact me directly to tell me about the promotion. I knew it through the internal mail. I felt disrespected. Later he wanted me to "move the working desk" for him but I refused. I am not scared of anyone in my office because I do not really need to worry about my career.

One of my colleagues was a gambler. He went to the casino in Macau all the time. He asked me to survey fengshui for him. When I went to his home, it was a "money leakage" setting and I tried to fix it for him. After that consultation, I told him "I am not a deity. If you keep gambling, you will keep losing money". Later on he won some money from casino. I told him again "don't spend all your money on gambling". He would not listen and he

told all the colleagues that my fengshui was efficacious. Finally he lost a lot of money and he was “escorted” back to Hong Kong by the loan sharks...He tried to borrow money from the co-workers. When he asked me, I told him my money was all spent on the stock market. We did not talk to each other anymore after that.

Although Brian has encountered these frustrating cases, he still believes that fengshui can help people. He took himself as an example:

As a driver working in the government, my monthly salary is about twenty thousand. But how can I have assets of millions of dollars? Fengshui can help me to earn the money in an easier way.

My full time job is a driver, and I am an amateur fengshui master. However, my major income is from the stock market.

Another informant, Keith Tang, is a manager in an insurance company who started to learn metaphysics since 1981, right before he joined the insurance industry. At that time, he was a clerk in another company and he was inspired because of a palm reading done by his then-colleague.

He did a palm reading for me and said I would get married at twenty nine. If not, one of my family members would die. I was very scared at that time and went to the public library to look for the books to clear my doubts. My interest about metaphysics started from this experience.

From the books, Keith found out what his co-worker said was wrong. He went to confront him and he admitted he was just “joking”. However, this started Keith’s life of a fengshui master.

Since then Keith read a lot of books related to various aspects: palm reading, face reading, bazi, fengshui and so on. In 1987, he attended some classes in a labour centre. It cost about two to three hundred dollars for ten lessons. He said that due to the large amount of reading he did before the classes, he asked a lot of questions in the class. One of his teachers said “you only paid so little, how can I teach you that much?” Keith thought his teacher was stingy and did not attend the class anymore. In early 1990s, he watched a television program about metaphysics. The fengshui specialist in the program attracted Keith. Later he started to learn metaphysics from him. At the

time in the interview Keith talked about this teacher, he opened a cabinet at his office and the cabinet was full of video tapes of the television program as he recorded every single episode. He described this was his fate.

The first time I went to this master's office was for a fortune telling. I did not make the appointment myself. My friend did and he asked me to go together. After that consultation, I knew I liked this master. Therefore, I decided to join his class to learn.

He admitted the job in an insurance company provided him a very suitable environment to practise his metaphysic knowledge.

When I was learning, I used the cases of insurance claims as my practices. When people claim the insurance compensations, they have to give the details of the incidents as well as corresponding proof like medical record and police statement. With the personal details of the applicants, I checked their *bazi* to see if they were destined to have the calamities. From this looking into these cases, I practised my *bazi* skills.

In 1996, Keith started to be a part time metaphysicist. At first he gave free advice to others. Gradually he has built up his reputation and charged people for the consultation. His clients range from residents of public housing to the owner of factories in mainland China. However, the money he earned from surveying fengshui is not a major income. Keith also emphasized he did not aim at selling insurance through giving fengshui advice "I do not want to talk about money. It makes the whole thing so utilitarian".

Fengshui Business

What services do the fengshui masters provide? Do they have any marketing strategies? How do they decide on their target group and prices? In this part I am going to see how these fengshui specialists operate their business.

According to my informants' business cards, most of them provide two main

services: fengshui and life reading⁴⁶. However, in this research, my major focus is on fengshui business. In the past, fengshui was normally used for home layout and tomb orientation. However, in addition to the previous uses, nowadays fengshui is now commonly applied to workplaces like factories and offices. For different locations, the fengshui specialists work differently. Although different people have different difficulties or goals, my informants told me that these problems would always be related to wealth, health or relationships. Among these three aspects, health is the first priority for household fengshui while wealth is the most important thing for the fengshui in workplaces. Human relationships would also be crucial for both situations.

For household fengshui, fengshui specialists can do an onsite survey at different points in the house-hunting, purchasing, and decoration processes. Many of my informants suggested that people bring a fengshui master with them with they go viewing properties. Ronald Kwong explained why it would be the best for the client and the fengshui master:

I always tell my clients they should get a master before they pay the deposit [for buying the property]... People can narrow down their choices [of properties] and ask the fengshui master to pick one. However, this does not work for some cases. I had a client who had cancer. He hired me to comment on the fengshui of his house and I found that the fengshui there was really bad. I asked him to move out and suggested him to consult me before he buy or rent the next one. He did but the properties he liked were all "cancer apartments". That means all the flat he chose were bad for his health. People in bad luck have this tendency to make the decisions which lead to or continue their bad fortune. A sick person gets a sick house. Poor person may find a flat which leaks money... To be frank, I hate asking my clients to move out from their flats when I think the situations cannot be improved. People may think you are incapable to improve so that you ask people to move. But there are always some cases of mismatch of people and their houses. Therefore, to avoid getting a wrong flat and leading to further problems, people should consider consulting a fengshui master before they purchase a property.

Although many fengshui specialists share the similar thought, not many people take

⁴⁶ Life reading: The original Chinese words "命理" can be understood as fortune telling through the date of birth, face reading, palm reading, and other oracles.

this advice. As for the fengshui masters, there is a possible problem leading from this advice. Auntie Lai told me it would be difficult for her to go viewing properties with her clients.

Of course it is good for the clients to consult me before they decide to buy a property. However, when I go viewing properties with my clients, I hate making any negative comments about the house in front of the real estate salesperson. I have to think about what is good for my clients and defend for their interests. When I think the flat is not good, I will ask my clients not to waste time on it...Sometimes when I see the salesperson trying hard to persuade my clients to buy the flat, I feel embarrassed when I have to ask my clients not to buy it. I got the dirty look from the salespersons several times. Well, this is my job...I just feel bad for them.

Auntie Lai's problem is not frequent encountered since people not often follow the specialists' suggestion of "consult prior to purchase". For a lot of clients, they hire fengshui specialists when they have got a house, or even when they have encountered problems.

Richard Yu admitted that most of his clients first approached him for solving fengshui problems.

It is a normal situation for the fengshui industry. If you live in a house for some years with no big problems, why would you bother to get a fengshui master? It must be something bad happens so that people need a fengshui master. The people are usually triggered by two reasons: health or wealth. For example, a person loses a lot of money at the same time in different aspects like failures in investment, losing job and even accidentally losing the wallet. Or the whole family fall ill at the same time. It is usually a series of problems that leads the people to come to me. Do you think people will ask for a fengshui consultation just because they fall on the street?

Of course there are some people consulting a fengshui master just because they want to make sure their flats are fine. Some of them may do it right after they buy the flat while some may consult us as they have a preliminary design layout. It is usually a one-time thing.

Another informant, Luk Yiu, provided an explanation to why some people consult the fengshui master after they get the property.

Not many people can have choices on their accommodation. There are so many restrictions to limit them. For instance, people like me who live in public housing do not really have choice. The flats are all assigned by the Housing Department. You do not have a chance to view the flat before you

say yes or no. What you can do is to peek through your neighbour's door to estimate how it really looks like and decide if you want it. After saying "no" for three times, you have to line up again. It really depends on one's luck to get a public flat with good fengshui...Most of the people buy the properties according to their financial situations. If you have more money, you have more choices. If people do not really have choices [of properties], why do they need a fengshui master to pick for them?

Though Luk tried to explain the situation with limited choices of living environment, he emphasized that people still have many opportunities to make the fengshui of their accommodations better as long as they get professional advice: "ask you fengshui master to help you with the decision of layout, decoration, furniture and so on. These things also count." Moreover, the auspicious and inauspicious directions are different every year. Moving furniture and changing setting in a better orientation according to it can result in better fengshui and compensate for the limited choice of accommodations.

Various informants said the breadwinners, among all family members, are the main focus in household fengshui. That means the breadwinner is the focus for the fengshui masters to work on when they give household fengshui consultation. Brian Poon mentioned:

Breadwinners are the most important in the family. They maintain the operation of the family. They earn money, provide materials and care to the children or the elderly. Therefore their benefits are considered first during fengshui consultation. It does not mean we do not consider the children and the old, but the centre is still the breadwinners.

And among different goals, the main point of household fengshui is to keep the family in good health. Victoria Chim gave an explanation:

People want to get everything by using fengshui. Money, health, harmonious family and so on. We fengshui masters try to help our clients to get what they want. Nevertheless, health is the most crucial thing. If a lot of money is placed in front of you but you do not have energy to take it up, you will understand the importance of having a healthy body... What we do first is to achieve health, and then we work on the wealth aspect.

Breadwinners and health are always placed prior to other things in consideration in the

household fengshui consultation. But this is not the same once the site is changed.

For the fengshui in workplace, the procedure of surveying it is similar to household fengshui. However, the main focus is totally different. Money is the goal of all kinds of business. Therefore, specialists do fengshui setting in workplace with the ultimate aim to help their clients making more money. Ronald Kwong shared his experience:

I was invited to survey fengshui for a company and it was just a normal office. It was not very big, probably thirty to forty staff, I guess. The benefit of the owner was my first priority and his goal was to make more money. All the settings were made to achieve this goal. There was one dead spot in the office where was not suitable for people to sit at there. However, as I told you that the office was not that big, they made use of every inch of the office. Unfortunately that spot could not be vacant or used to place photocopier or other stuff. It had to be a seat for a staff. The staff who sat there would definitely get sick. It sounds so cruel, right? To be frank, the life and death of the staff should not be my consideration. I had to think for my client. I told my client about the dead spot and he was the one who decided how to make use of the spot... Only people with bad luck would sit at that spot. Bad fengshui would not be the sole factor [leading to sickness].

Wealth is the ultimate goal for workplace fengshui. The focus of the fengshui setting is money and benefits of the company owners. Circumstances other than those can be ignored. But in order to make more money, various industries may need different elements. Therefore, the emphasis of fengshui setting in workplace varies by the nature of the business. For example, conflicts are not necessary bad for all business. Law firms survive on conflicts. To them, being harmonious implies no need of conciliation, law firms will receive no business. They need the fengshui setting to “attract” more conflicts. General desirable goals may not be applicable to all the industries. The fengshui masters have to be flexible to deal with different clients.

In general, my fengshui specialist informants think the role of a fengshui masters should be to act as a problem solver for their clients and hence to help them to get what they want. Under various circumstances, the fengshui masters have to think

for their clients and tailor-make the setting for individuals' aims.

Among my fengshui specialist informants, no one has published a personal advertisement on the media⁴⁷. Unlike the famous fengshui specialists, my informants mainly depend on their existing clients' introducing them to friends and other potential customers. For fengshui consultation, it can be a one-time survey or it can be an annual "check-up". As mentioned before, people who want to make sure the fengshui of their newly-purchased property is fine may hire a fengshui master to give a one-time consultation. The ups and downs of the real estate market affect the business of my informants directly. The number of transactions decreases, less people purchase properties and hence fewer fengshui consultations are needed. But fengshui masters do not depend only on this. Since one of the duties of fengshui specialists is to solve clients' problem, new potential customers may seek the specialist advice once they encounter a series of problems at the same time. Among these clients, some of them may be completely new to fengshui, while some of them may need a change of fengshui masters. This phenomenon is not uncommon to my informants. In fact, many of them mentioned they did remedy work for clients who previously hired famous fengshui specialists. Usually these clients would not tell my informants for having another consultation from other famous specialists but my informants recognizes some ornaments which were often used by particular specialists, which were just like the signatures. Victoria described the situation:

Some clients like to try different fengshui masters. I do not see this kind of job as remedy work... For the clients who had hired famous fengshui masters, I could tell by the ornaments they used for the fengshui setting. For example, a very famous master often uses music box for his setting. I asked my clients when I saw these signature ornaments "You hired Mr. So-and-so before?" as they normally not told you anything about the previous consultation unless you asked. They were surprised by my question and asked why I knew. I guess many other fengshui masters have similar experiences. They are

⁴⁷ Only one has published an advertisement of the family fengshui business in a fengshui magazine.

famous but that does not mean they are efficacious. It is just because their works were not efficacious enough and the clients had to hire me or other specialists to do the remedy... One of my clients lost a factory and an apartment because his previous specialist chose a wrong residential property for him to live in. When he came to me, I suggested him to move to another rented flat. Eventually his business and health got improved but he could not go back to the previous status... Fengshui cannot turn death into life.

Richard Yu gave a similar example:

In recent years, I got a lot of cases which are related to other famous fengshui masters. These famous masters just want to get money and don't care about the effect. I did some follow-up "remedies" for their works. People think they are good because they appear on television all the time... One company [whose owner hired a famous specialist before] closed down before I could do any remedy.

Another informant, Ronald Kwong, even "thanked" those famous fengshui masters for giving him more clients. It seems that this kind of transfer of clients is not new to the fengshui masters.

After attracting new clients, the specialists need to maintain these people and convert them into regular customers. Their reputations are very important to them to maintain the existing clients and attract more new clients. Luk Yiu has his own view on this: "being efficacious is the only way to maintain your clients." On the other hand, Richard Yu has his own way: "I emphasize on 'after sale service'. Just like a doctor, I sometimes call and ask my clients 'How is the effect?', 'How do you feel?' Side effects may appear as people may not adapt well to the big change." C. Y. Cheng, one of my fengshui class teachers, charges his clients for only once a year and gives an onsite fengshui survey. The clients can call and ask unlimited questions within that year as my teacher keeps all the layout of the properties he checks. Through these interactions of asking and answering questions, these masters can communicate with their clients more frequently and hence consolidate their relations as well as maintain the clients.

In fengshui industry, a month before and after Lunar New Year is the peak season. Many fengshui masters are busy in that period of time because many people

want to have annual fengshui consultations. Some of my informants think it is an indication to see if the masters are efficacious. Ronald Kwong told me his situation:

Since the positions of stars change every year, the auspicious and inauspicious directions change correspondingly. Therefore many people consult fengshui masters around Lunar New Year for a new setting to deal with the coming year... My bookings are usually full in that period of time. Sometimes I have to postpone or even refuse some because I have no time to handle them. For me, the customer drain is not severe and I have new clients every year... If your fengshui master is not busy around Lunar New Year, you can imagine how "efficacious" he is.

When there is no objective qualification to judge one's ability, the number of clients can be a sign to show the insiders as well as the outsiders how "efficacious" the specialists are. The more the clients, the higher the efficacy.

The Mission of Fengshui Masters

Apart from solving problems of health, wealth and relationships, some of my informants think they have a duty to maintain justice in the society and for some of them, fengshui or metaphysic knowledge is a way to help those people in need and hence maintain the social justice. In fact, many of my informants see it as the mission of being a fengshui master.

Ronald Kwong is one of my informants who thinks fengshui specialists have the responsibility to help maintain justice. This thought was inspired by one of his client, a fugitive gang member, more than ten years ago. The gang member did drug smuggling and was wanted by the Hong Kong police. He hired Kwong to help him escape. With detailed calculation, Kwong picked the most suitable time and route for this gang member to leave Hong Kong. This fugitive man fled to mainland China by boat successfully. With this experience, Kwong admitted he was wrong for taking this case.

I was greedy. I got a huge amount of money from this business. At that time, I

was young and I wanted to try if I was capable enough. Therefore I took the case... There were other gang members calling me for help after that. I refused all and I even changed my phone number... Now I think there should be justice in the society and I should help to maintain it. Being a fengshui master, it is easy for me to earn money because I can take advantage from the people who are in need. People come to me asking for help, no matter the problem is legal or illegal. Now I do not accept any business involved in criminal case. People who commit crimes deserve to be punished.

Apart from the legal justice of this case, some informants mentioned another kind justice, social justice. Keith Tang, an amateur fengshui specialist, works in the insurance industry and he thinks through charging certain kinds of people with a higher fengshui consultation fee can help maintain social justice.

I admit that I charge some people a higher price such as doctors and funeral salespersons. Nowadays many private practice doctors charge patients with health insurance a higher price because they think the money is not from the patients but insurance companies. This is totally wrong. First, it does not make sense to charge two people with the same illness for different prices only because one buys the insurance. Second, the additional money will finally be paid by the patients because the insurance company will eventually charge the patients more for the insurance later. Finally it is the patients with insurance who suffer from it. Being a doctor should have the responsibility to cure people... For the funeral salespersons, they like to take advantage of the people who are in a weak moment. When a person dies, the relatives of that person feel sad and helpless. A lot of funeral salespersons charge those relatives more because people usually do not argue or bargain in this situation. Or they convince people to use more expensive services or products. These tricks are dirty. Therefore, I charge them higher in order to keep the justice.

The meaning of "justice" differs between people. Besides defining it by law, "justice" can be referred to the moral codes of particular peoples. Within the market economy, the fengshui master tries to counter the "immoral enemies" through marking the price up, which is exactly the same thing that the enemies are doing.

Moreover, helping people in need is also regarded as a mission by some fengshui masters. Wong Lai, who is usually called Auntie Lai by her clients, sees her job as a means to help people. She started to learn metaphysic in 1991 and when she was in her forties. Her initial intention to learn fengshui and other metaphysical knowledge was not for earning a living. She was stimulated by her miserable

experience.

My husband died of kidney problem in the mid 1980s. My twin daughters were only eleven years old. Of course I had been sad and emotionally unstable for years. I was not willing to accept my husband's death and kept asking why: "why did this thing happen", "why me". Therefore, I started to look for my answers by learning metaphysic...I had started to take course right after my daughter left school to work. At first, I was teased all the time because of my age and stupidity. One time I worshipped the Goddess of Mercy and asked her to grant me wisdom... after fifteen years of learning, I set up my own business... Without the help of the Goddess of Mercy, I would not have this business. Therefore, I see this business as a way to help others.

In fact, before she has set up her own business in 2006, Auntie Lai had helped the people who were in need by giving fengshui advice.

I know how it feels when you are helpless because I had been through it. I helped them without asking rewards because they were in miserable situations. Some of them might insist giving my red packets of one or two hundred dollars. In fact I really did not mind how much they give. I just wanted to help. However, gradually I found that some people were really greedy. For example, there was a man who was jobless when I first met him. He gave me a red packet of two hundred dollars after the fengshui and *bazi* consultation. After that, his situation had got better and better and he kept seeing me once a year. Last time in our consultation he told me he had got a full time job and his situation was getting much better but he still paid me the same price. I was disappointed. Is it a bit insulting to give two hundred dollars to someone who helped you? There were a lot of other cases that the clients invited me to give free consultations for their families. They even came with the extended family of three generations [for free fortune telling].

One of the Auntie Lai's twin daughters, Yan, works as her mother's assistant. Yan takes care of every thing in the shop including arrangement of appointments and designing and purchasing fengshui products for sale. She added to her mother's point:

We charge people a reasonable price. This is to prevent people from taking advantage of my mother. Sometimes my mother is too softhearted and emotionally too engaged in her clients' sad stories. She always asks me "should we waive this client's consultation fee?" when she sees some people with financial and emotional problems. I usually say no. We open the shop and we try to make a living by this business. We cannot give free consultations all the times. And this would spoil her clients too...Nowadays my mother donates a lot of money to the charities in China, especially to those education-related projects. Because she knows knowledge can change people's life. She just makes use of her metaphysical knowledge to help others.

My mother pays more attention to those who are emotionally weak because of her own experience. Sometimes I can hear her clients crying

during the consultations. Some of them even calls my mother at midnight to talk about their sad things but my mother seldom hangs up...My mother is always supportive to those clients and she is like a psychiatrist to them.

Inspired by her painful past, Auntie Lai believes that she can help people directly and indirectly with her fengshui knowledge because she sees her knowledge solves others' problems.

Luk Yiu is another fengshui specialist who tries to use his metaphysic knowledge to help others but the starting point of his help is the house decoration and renovation. He said:

I am a volunteer decoration worker for physically disabled people. I help them to renovate the house to be suitable for them to live. During this process, I give some free fengshui advice too...I cannot cure their physical problems but I try to help them with their life in the future, to make them easier.

Through his helps, Luk has made friends with some of these disabled people. Since there is an altar in Luk's home, they have a gathering once a month in there to worship the deity and chit-chat. The content of their conversation is always about metaphysics.

Apart from worshipping and eating, they come to my home to ask questions. We do divination during our gathering. I have all of their personal details like date of birth or even the exact time of birth. I save the information like medical record. Their questions are like the questions of other ordinary people, about human relationship, wealth and health...Some of them are disabled since they were born. You cannot blame anyone and there is no way to change it. They are destined to have more obstacles in their life than others...The Chinese proverb "Fate is the first, luck is the second, fengshui is the third".⁴⁸ Although their fates are not good, my role, as a friend as well as a fengshui specialist, is to help them with their luck and the fengshui of their homes.

Luk emphasized that helping people is the right thing for an orthodox fengshui specialist to do.

In the above examples, we can see that the role of fengshui specialists is not

⁴⁸ [jat meng ji wan saam fung seoi]: 一命二運三風水 is a proverb to describe the priority of things which can affect one's life.

only to serve the people who pay. By selectively rejecting cases (like the unjust gangsters), charging extra and giving free advice, the fengshui specialists can claim to support social justice and fulfill the mission of being fengshui specialists.

Visiting Other Metaphysicists

In the interviews with my fengshui specialist informants, I found that many of them have visited or learned from other metaphysicists, after they have become masters and make money through the knowledge. Richard Yu had the consulted other metaphysicists and he regarded this act as getting inspiration:

Sometimes I have my questions which I cannot solve. I have two solutions to this situation. First, I discuss with my fellow apprentices or get advice from my teacher's teacher. Second, I pretend to be a client and go to consult other metaphysics. This is to get other masters talking [about their views or solutions on certain problems]... The fengshui masters of older generation are more selfish. They would not give your direct answers... I have visited one who was a total phony. Basically he lives on cheating. The other masters I visited were fine. They were not 100% accurate but they were not completely wrong.

As a fengshui master, or problem solver, Richard has his own difficult problems from his clients which need the help of other metaphysicists. Through visiting other specialists, he learned how others would handle particular questions. These "solutions" were useful for him to deal with his own clients. And Richard's experiences were not unique among my informants.

It seems that getting inspirations and observing how to do the fengshui business from other masters are not something strange in the industry. Some of my informants went to the various classes of different aspects of metaphysics held by the same organization, which organized the classes that I took for my field work. Victoria Chim, as an inherited fengshui specialist whose father operates a metaphysics learning centre, had joined others' classes in order to see how others gave lessons. She found

that a part of the course contents of others' classes and of the classes organized by her family were overlapped but the ways they presented the knowledge were quite differently.

I think I would describe the classes I have taken as hobby classes. For example, I request my students to recite some information like the heavenly stems and earthly branches. These are the basics for learning metaphysics. If they can memorize these things, they can use the knowledge more fluently and catch up with further knowledge more easily. But the class I went provided the students with a pile of notes. The teachers did not ask their students to recite and the students just need to read the notes and search for the things they need. I am not saying it is bad. The course is suitable for people who do not want to have any pressure. It is just not the way we teach. I always tell the students in my classes to recite many things. It is for their own good. The way to learn metaphysics is to pay effort, unless they treat it as a hobby class.

Victoria Chim in fact showed her disagreement with these specialists' teaching methods and she drew a line between "hobby class" and "professional class", which her family's fengshui centre provides. As I did my field work in the classes held by the same organization, the atmosphere of the classes is like what Victoria described, especially the elementary fengshui course I attended. It could be because the organization holds a lot of other hobby courses like art, cookery, sports and at the same time other classes related to practical skills for work are also provided. It is not very clear that the classes of metaphysics are for leisure or to equip people who want to be a metaphysicist. Obviously, Victoria had separated the classes she attended and the ones she gave as two levels, the former one was only for leisure while the latter one was for real, skills for earning a living. She also emphasized that she expected and prepared some of the insiders of the metaphysics industry would take her or her father's classes and they welcome it. In one of the class he took organized by another fengshui master, Ronald Kwong directly pointed out that teacher was "unqualified": "He spent more than 80% of the class on writing the notes on the board. He asked us to write down the things. It seemed that the only thing he knew was writing." Kwong described the class

he took was a waste of time as there was not much discussion or question asking about the knowledge in the lessons, which he expected. Coincidentally the “unqualified” teacher Kwong described was one of my teachers. As Kwong took the class years ago, things changed and I was given some notes in the class and I did not need to copy everything. Nevertheless, the teacher did spend some time every lesson to write extra information on the board for us to copy. Kwong had limited teaching experience but he despised the teaching method of the “unqualified teacher” and he valued the discussion time in the class he provided “I taught for a bit more than a year. It was a private class with about a dozen of students. Some of them were my clients before the class. As the class size was small, they could ask any question and the discussion went freely.” Kwong thinks that various books about the knowledge sold in the market can fulfill people with the background and theories of metaphysics. People do not need the class that repeats the knowledge already given by the books. Therefore, Kwong believes the question and answer session should be the most important part for people who want to learn metaphysics so that they can learn practical stuff from the teacher and hence using the skills in the real life. From the stories of Victoria Chim and Ronald Kwong, it seems that visiting other fengshui specialists’ classes is not always a way to get positive inspiration. On the contrary, they saw what was undesirable from others’ lessons and they avoided these things happened in their own classes.

Temple Street⁴⁹ is another place that my informants can do the observations, or “experiments”. Yan, Auntie Lai’s daughter, does her research for her mother at Temple Street from time to time. She usually observes quietly next to the fortune telling stalls to see how the specialists deal with different questions from the clients. She thinks she can mainly learn something to deal with challenging customers or questions because

⁴⁹ Temple Street is a street at Yau Ma Tei, Hong Kong. There are a lot of fortune-telling stalls at the night market and they do different kinds of divinations like face reading, palm reading, bird divinations, tarots and so on.

the needs of general clients are more or less similar. However, Yan admits the sources of customers between them and street stalls are different and hence the techniques to attract clients cannot be copied: "They can give the passers-by some free advice to attract them to sit down at the stalls but we do not do that." The clients of Yan's mother, Auntie Lai, are usually introduced from friends or other clients but few are random customers. Moreover, their shop is inside a commercial and residential building in Kowloon, which is totally different from a street stall and there is no passer-by. Although not all the things got from the observations were useful, Yan said she would keep visiting Temple Street and she concluded that "They [the fortune tellers in Temple Street] must have their own strengths to survive among a bunch of fortune tellers in the same street, no matter it is real skills or packaging tricks." Unlike Yan, Brian Poon visited other fortune teller in Temple Street with the intention to challenge the master.

Somebody told me that a chairman of a listed company visited a fortune teller at the Temple Street and he was said to be very efficacious. I was curious and wanted to know if it was true... I gave him my date of birth. After a while of calculation, he asked me how much money I owe the others. In fact, I am a person that is afraid of owing other's money. I clear my credit card bills every month. Then I answered him "Probably several hundred dollars, as I have not paid the credit card bills this month." Maybe the people who go to fortune tellers are usually in bad luck... It is impossible to get 100% accurate. He got about 70% to 80 % accurate. It is okay though... I just wanted to know his method and how he did his business. The specialists go to consult other masters because they want to do better.

Although Brian described the master he consulted was "okay" and what he wanted from the consultation was observing the master's skills, the "owing money" part he told actually showed that he was not really satisfied with the fortune teller, who was told be "very efficacious". He did not directly comment the telling was wrong or inaccurate but he emphasized his personality did not match the telling. Towards a "very efficacious" master, Brian seemed to expect a more accurate telling from him.

70% to 80% of accuracy clearly did not reach his expectation and the master was not as powerful as people described.

Since it is not uncommon for metaphysicists to visit other specialists, Luk Yiu had once been consulted by his friend, who claimed himself as the best fengshui specialist in a county in Guangdong. This man was originally from Guangdong and he immigrated to Hong Kong. Luk knew him through volunteer work. One day this friend invited Luk to “visit his hometown” and then to survey the sites of his ancestral tombs “conveniently”. Since the local government of that county was going to forbid random burial soon, Luk’s friend exhumed and relocated the urns of his ancestors to the spots of good fengshui he selected before the authority executed the new policy. The friend told Luk that those locations were “carefully chosen” and asked Luk to comment. Luk sighed when he re-told the stories:

It was a mess. I did not understand how he picked those spots. I saw the first two locations on a hill and then he wanted me to survey another spots on another hill. I refused as the first two were not real good fengshui locations and I could imagine the other spots were not good either. It was a waste of time and energy to go up the hill to see [the spots]... He told me he worked in a construction team when he was in mainland China. There was a senior engineer who knew fengshui and taught him the skills... I could not believe he claim himself as a fengshui master.

Luk tried to explain the low quality of the fengshui specialists from mainland China by the Cultural Revolution. During the period, the books concerning fengshui and other divinations were either destroyed like other religious materials or brought to Taiwan by the Kuomintang. Therefore, the lack of reading materials and the ban of “superstitious” activities were the reasons why the fengshui specialists in mainland were not as good as the ones in Hong Kong. The experience of being consulted by a fengshui master friend indeed showed Luk was more “qualified” fengshui specialist than his friend.

From the above examples regarding “visiting other fengshui masters”, I found

that during encounters between specialists, they learned and observed the skills of handling questions, of doing business, or of teaching from one another. For my informants, what they gained from these visits was not necessarily positive. It could be negative but they identified these bad things and prevented repeating them. At the same time, by telling the stories of these visits and consultation, my informants distinguished themselves and showed a sense of superiority over other fengshui specialists. By identifying “phony”, “unqualified teacher” or “a fengshui master who did not know how to pick a right spot for tomb”, my informants did reflect their better knowledge or skills in metaphysics. Not all informants directly pointed out they were good and the others were bad. The subtle differentiations could be describing others’ skills as “packaging tricks”, “teaching hobby class” or “accuracy of 70% to 80%” in contrast to their “real skills”, “professional-level course” as well as “accuracy of 90% or more. Through all these obvious or subtle differences, the specialists showed that they were able to see what was bad and what was good. This implied that they had certain standard to judge others people in the industry.

Insiders’ Explanations for Difficulties in Doing Fengshui Research

Doing research on fengshui specialists is not an easy task. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, my original key informant, who promised to let me follow him to onsite fengshui surveys, changed his mind after the first interview. For this frustrating situation, I asked my other informants to see if there was any possibility for me to follow them doing participant observations. Most of the answers were discouraging and they thought my research method, i.e. doing participant observation during fengshui consultation, was nearly impossible. However, many of them tried to provide explanations to my difficult circumstance.

Most of the fengshui master informants mentioned the privacy issue. It is not their own privacy but the clients' that the specialists concerned. During the fengshui consultations, some specialists require the dates of births of their clients along to make sure the fengshui settings match the clients' fates. Sometimes the details of all household members are needed. In this situation, the fates of the clients and their family members are exposed. That means the life secrets of them are revealed. My informants told me that many people would mind others knowing their secrets and hence doing observations in fengshui consultation was not a good idea. Keith Tang illustrated this point.

For example, if a fengshui specialist goes to give an onsite survey for a property and found out that host couple are not really compatible after using their dates of birth for calculation. Moreover, the original setting of their place does not favour having a baby. The master wants to confirm his judgment by asking questions like "Do you want to have a baby?" or "Do you have any difficulty [in conceiving a baby]?" These are all sensitive things that the clients may not want to reveal. At the same time, the clients may want the specialist to put a fengshui setting to boost the harmony of the relationship and bring them a baby. It will be embarrassing enough for them to ask a fengshui master to solve their very personal problems, let alone a total unknown researcher, who looks at them and tries to record down everything.

As the personal problems may involve a lot of sensitive information such as extra marital affairs, sexual relationships, tactics against business competitors and so on, the fengshui masters need to protect their clients' benefits and prevent the data exposed. This task directly influences the reputations of the specialists. Luk Yiu thought the presence of the researcher may affect the master's business.

The dates of birth of all people [of a household] are needed for the fengshui consultation. Once their fates are revealed, there will be no privacy at all. If there is an outsider observing the whole thing, it will be very embarrassing. Who wants to show their deep down secrets to a stranger? Not only their age, but everything about their life... If the master does not protect their clients' privacy, he will lose the clients eventually and hence the business will be impacted.

The privacy of the customers is obviously a concern to the specialists as they are hired

to solve ones' life mystery, something that people may not want to disclose. The consequences of violation can lead to bad reputations and therefore affects the business. Observation of onsite fengshui survey by a research can bring influences to a master's career and income and that is a possible reason why my original key informant refused to help.

Another explanation for the difficult situation is that the fengshui specialist himself does not have many consultations to give. There are at least two factors influential to the number of business. First it is about the ability of the fengshui specialist. If the master is not really efficacious in fengshui, not many clients will be attracted and hire him or her for fengshui survey. The second factor is related to the activity of the property market in Hong Kong. If the number of transaction is low, that means fewer people move or buy a new property and hence no fengshui consultation is needed. Fewer people would ask for fengshui survey for a rental residential property. Therefore the businesses of the fengshui masters are affected by the activity of the real estate markets. Brian Poon, who claimed his major income is from personal investment and actively involved in the financial market, asked me when I looked for the explanation for the situation: "The [real estate] market is so quiet recently, is it possible that your master [Richard Yu] has no business?" Since there was no way to confirm whether Richard Yu had sufficient clients at that period of time, the statistics of the Land Registry could show that the number of agreements for sale and purchase of building units in 2008 was 22% lower than the number in 2007⁵⁰. However, there was still not a concrete correlation between the two factors.

Could serving as an assistant to the fengshui master solve the problem? Most of my informants told me that they usually survey fengshui alone. They did not have

⁵⁰ The statistics can be accessed at <http://www.landreg.gov.hk/en/monthly/stat08yr.htm>.

any apprentice (徒弟). Some of them had experience teaching organized classes, and saw the people taking the classes as their students. These students learned from them in the classroom and sometimes by going to the countryside to see the landscapes. They might have chances to see household fengshui as group learning. However, these students did not usually see how their teachers gave fengshui consultation in a real deal. Being an apprentice and hence an assistant would mean a closer relationship with the master. The most common examples of assistants serving a master that I found were cases of children of a master. Victoria and her sister had followed their father to do onsite fengshui surveys. Yan, who told me she did not want to follow in the footsteps of her mother, Auntie Lai, had gone to give fengshui consultations with her mother just as an assistant, not an apprentice. Only one informant, Luk Yiu, had served as an apprentice, and even he served not his teacher but his teacher's teacher. The others did not go through a long apprenticeship but took different courses from various specialists. Learning through self practice is not unusual for my informants. I suggested serving as my informants' assistant, but they took it as a joke and noted that I had to take many classes and be more knowledgeable before I could assist them. They knew my identity as a researcher, and may have used this as an excuse to avoid my researcher's gaze. Victoria told me the elements I needed for my research were money and time. She took her family's fengshui centre as an example. It takes several thousand dollars for a course and one has to take several courses to learn all the foundations of the metaphysics. The estimated time to finish these courses is two to three years. This is just for "students", before being an apprentice. If one wants to be an apprentice, hundreds of thousands of dollars and many years would be needed. More than that, building up a relationship with the master takes considerable effort as well. In their view, only an insider could do participatory research. They were

unwilling to let a beginner assist at their consultations. It was therefore impossible for me to begin such a project without a stronger background in metaphysics.

It could be a mix of reasons leading to the difficulty in my research. However, with the explanations of other fengshui specialists, they showed that their job was actually following the trend of the market and it was not their “fault” that the real market was inactive. Moreover, protection of the clients’ privacy was claimed to be their job requirement. If the customers want to keep the consultation private, they have to do so. According to the insiders, the reasons for the failure of observing fengshui consultation were anything but the fengshui master’s intention.

Conclusion

It seems that there is no particular formula for becoming a fengshui specialists, or metaphysicists. Some starts with reading books, some may have a tutor at the very beginning while born to be a master can also be possible. The motivations behind the pursuit of the career of a metaphysicist vary as well. Life’s difficulties, sickness, curiosity can be the reasons that turn people into a new life perspective. At the same time, fengshui specialists are the problem solvers and they handle clients’ life mysteries. Advice and solutions can be sought from them at different stages at the customers’ convenience. Apart from making a living on their fengshui knowledge, the specialists have the missions to help the people in need and to maintain social justice with their skills. By visiting other metaphysicists, they can get inspired or learn from others’ shortcomings so that they can improve their skills and build up a sense of power superiority over other specialists. Although they visit other metaphysicists themselves, they show some kinds of reluctance for researcher to get a peek at how they give a consultation for their clients. And the explanations provided by the insiders

are associated with external factors. After all, the mystery of the fengshui specialists is mutually protected by the individual insiders and is easily undermined by the presence of an assistant.

Chapter 5 – Fengshui Classes

In Hong Kong, taking classes learning fengshui is not rare. These courses are offered by various fengshui specialists and organizations such as labor union and district councilors' offices. Their costs vary and people can take these classes according to their budget, time and particular interest. In the classes I took, the students focused on learning the skills in order to solve their individual problems. They showed this through their frequent questions, during and after class, about how to solve personal fengshui problems. The instructors, on the other hand, tried to sell themselves to the students, and spent a good deal of time on stories that sought to demonstrate their prowess rather than transferring knowledge. The contents of the lessons shows how fengshui has adapted to Hong Kong society: it is very much focused on individual rather than collective needs, and focuses on home interiors since there is little most residents can do about their apartment's orientation to mountain and rivers.

Who Joined the Classes?

In contrast to hobbies classes such as cooking and dancing, where students chat and are friendly with each other, the fengshui classes that I took had almost no chit chat or socializing. The elementary class was a bit better, but in the intermediate class it seemed to be taboo for students to talk to each other. It is as though the competitive relationship between fengshui masters is already present in students.

The twelve-lesson elementary interior fengshui course I attended was scheduled on Sunday mornings and started from late April 2008. The teacher of the class, Mr. Cheng, claimed he had been teaching in the labor union for around twenty

years. Within these years he did not only give fengshui classes but also classes of other divinations like palm and face readings. There were nineteen registered students, ten female and nine male, excluding me. Throughout the whole course, numbers of the students attended were getting fewer every lesson. Only six persons including me were constant participants of the class. Started from the beginning, the class was a quiet one. People did not interact much. At the first few lessons I assumed it was because the students were strangers to each other. The gradual decrease in the number of students attended did not seem to improve the situation. People left the classroom once the lesson was done and they did not chit chat after the lesson. The quiet atmosphere was not improved until the last two lessons, the lessons in which the classmates shared their household layouts for discussions. In fact, the discussions were not enthusiastic and the teacher still dominated the time but these two lessons became the most interactive experience in the elementary course⁵¹.

After finishing the elementary course, I took the intermediate one, a total of twelve lessons on Wednesday evening from July to October 2008. The class was taught by another instructor, Mr. Yeung. Similar to the teacher of the elementary course, Mr. Yeung had been a teacher in the labor union for fengshui and other divinations for more than ten years. Among the forty two students in the class, most of them took Yeung's elementary course as they did show a sense of familiarity in the first lesson. However, the acquaintance of the instructor and his teaching style did not guarantee an exchange or sharing between the students. On the contrary, the atmosphere of this class was more unsociable than the previous one. Apart from a group of three and two couples, the rest of the students were individual participants. It

⁵¹ There are two possible explanations for the atmosphere of the class. The first one is the time of the class. As the class started at around 10 in the morning on Sunday, the classmates might not be that awake and active in the class. On the other hand, the instructor of the course, who did not prepare for the class, could be a reason for the cold atmosphere. Since he was lazy and the class was disorganized, it could be a waste of time to some of the registered students.

seemed that the students were more heterogeneous in this class as the backgrounds varied from age of twenties to sixties, housewives to white-collars to retired. With more than thirty students attended every lesson, the interaction between the students was minimal. As the class was set at seven in the evening, some of the classmates went to the class right after their work. However, their serious learning attitude was not affected by the exhaustion after a whole day work. It was reflected first from how they chose their seats. In a classroom with a capacity of forty four students, the environment was crowded and people who arrived early usually wanted the seats in the front rows, in which they could have a better view of the white board. Unlike other hobby classes with relax atmosphere, the students in this fengshui course were very attentive. Although a pile of notes was given to every student at the first lesson, they jotted down what the instructor added or wrote on the board as if the information was the key of the examination. On the other hand, chatting in the class was almost forbidden as everyone was so concentrated on the lesson. The silence in the classroom was not like the quietness in the elementary course. This one involved a sense of competitiveness. After the class, the students left the center immediately or they stayed asking the teaching questions but there was not much exchange between them. It looked like people taking the course were not regarded this as a hobby class to kill their time. They were coming to get into the fengshui world and this could also be explained by why more than fifty percent of the classmates decided to sign up in the advanced level course held by the instructor's classmate to pursue further studies (see below).

Contents Taught in the Classes

There are two main schools mentioned in the classes: The School of Forms (巒頭) and The School of Cosmology (理氣). The School of Forms is about the

tangible things—the shape of the hills, buildings, roads etc. Every physical feature in the environment can be an influence in fengshui and it does not involve the use of fengshui compasses. The School of Cosmology is about something intangible such as direction and constellations. This school has different branches, each with different methods for calculating the fengshui of a place. For this school, the fengshui compass is essential. In general, the School of Forms today is used more for the landscapes and the external environment, while the School of Cosmology is more suitable for interior spaces. Since the classes I signed up for were entitled “Interior Fengshui”, I expected them to focus on everything inside a house, but both teachers also taught something about the fengshui of the outer environment and landscape. As one informant told me, a good fengshui master needs to be able to examine both the environment and the internal fengshui. Another informant said that the fengshui is determined 70 percent by the environment and 30 percent by the internal fengshui. This also explains why one of my classes used photos of different places in Hong Kong as examples to illustrate various fengshui characteristics, essentially teaching about concepts from the School of Forms in a class that focused on the School of Cosmology. In the following part, I will discuss what I have learnt from the classes.

The School of Forms

The teaching of the School of Forms was the focus of the elementary course but it only occupied two lessons out of twelve in the intermediate class. In the elementary class, the structure of the course was loose and the teacher seemed to have no particular topic for different lessons. He claimed that the course he taught was “elementary interior fengshui” so that he refused to talk about anything involved fengshui calculations, which was the School of Cosmology. That was why his teaching

was more focused on the School of Forms. As this school is about the landscapes, it was quite abstract to learn in the classrooms as we did not have any outing sessions. Mr. Cheng, the instructor of the beginners' class, used pictures with projector and the graphs on his notes to assist his illustrations while in the intermediate class the note given by the teacher was all texts without photos. The teacher sometimes drew the shapes and forms on the white board for further explanations. Both teachers used different examples in Hong Kong to tell the students how various landscapes affected the fengshui of a place and how to choose a good house by surveying the outer environment. In the last two lessons of the first course, the teacher told students to take some pictures of the outer environment from the house and brought them to the class for discussions. For instance, from a picture taken by a classmate, who lived in an old building in Tsuen Wan, the teacher thought the bumpy and messy roof of the neighboring building was thought to be bad for accumulating wealth. The teacher asked all the students to come up with a solution for this fengshui problem but no one could think of one possible way to solve it. It was no way to block the window and hence the view of the roof. On the other hand, it was impossible to clean up the mess by the classmate himself as it was not the building he lived. For this, the teacher suggested the student to file a complaint to the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department reported the accumulation of water on the bumpy roof and led to a lot of mosquitoes and asked them to take actions to clean it up. Another example was that a female classmate who lived in the third floor while there was a big tree outside her window. The instructor said it was the thorn in her side. Since the lady lived in a public estate and the tree belonged to the government, she could not do anything to remove it. The teacher's solution for this was to use a thin metal chain, which people might not easily find out, circling the tree and a lock pad to keep the chain locked. According in

the principles of the five elements, metal could restrain wood so that the problem of wood could be removed.

The School of Cosmology—*Baat Zaak* (八宅), or Eight Mansions

There are various branches of the School of Cosmology. *Fei Sing* (飛星), or Flying Stars and *Baat Zaak* (八宅), or Eight Mansions, are the two different calculations of fengshui taught in the intermediate course. For the branch of Eight Mansions, not only the directions of the house but also the birth year of the person living in it are also considered to see if the house is good for the person. Both house and people can be categorized as East or West. Basically, from the year of birth, a person can calculate his life trigram⁵² (命卦): *Kin* (乾), *Kwan* (坤), *Zan* (震), *Seon* (巽), *Ham* (坎), *Lei* (離), *Gan* (艮), *Dui* (兌), and hence his personal favorable and unfavorable directions. The life trigram of a person determines whether he belongs to East Group (東四命)—*Zan*, *Seon*, *Ham* and *Lei* or West Group (西四命)—*Kin*, *Kwan*, *Gan* and *Dui*. According to the fengshui of Eight Mansions, a house can be divided into nine parts. Apart from the center part, the eight parts represents eight directions, or eight trigrams and these eight directions are separated into four auspicious spots—*Tin Ji* (天醫), *Fuk Wai* (伏位), *Jin Nin* (延年), *Saang Hei* (生氣), and four inauspicious positions—*Luk Saat* (六煞), *Ng Gwai* (五鬼), *Zyut Ming* (絕命) and *Wo Hoi* (禍害). These directions, or trigrams, work with the life trigram of the person so that the personally fortunate and unfortunate locations can be found. People of East Group should live in an East House (東四宅) while people of West Group should pick a West House (西四宅)⁵³. In this branch, four locations in a house are particularly important:

⁵² Life trigram is the trigram under which one is born.

⁵³ The “East” and “West” categories in people and in house here do not refer to the magnetic

the sitting position (坐), the door, the stove and the bed of the host. For a good fengshui house, the directions of these locations have to match with the life trigram of the person who living it. Furthermore, each trigram has its own representations such as body parts, age, sex and Chinese horoscopes. For instance, the trigram of Kin represents the northwest, the head, the father of a house, and the horoscopes of dog and pig. The missing of any part in a property will lead to corresponding illness or different problems.

The following layout of an apartment in Hong Kong (Figure 5.1) is a brief example to show how this works. The house owner is a man born in 1951, whose life trigram is *Seon*⁵⁴. For the Eight Mansions Branch, the sitting position is opposite the main door⁵⁵, and hence is east in this case, represented by *Zan* of the eight trigrams. The life trigram of the person who lives in this house, *Seon*, and the house trigram, *Zan*, belong to the East group, which means the house is favorable to the host. For the *Zan* residence (震宅), the four auspicious directions are *Fuk Wai* on the east, *Jin Nin* on the southeast, *Tin Ji* on the North and *Saang Hei* on the south, while the inauspicious locations are *Luk Saat* on the northeast, *Ng Gwai* on the northwest, *Zyut Ming* on the west as well as *Wo Hoi* on the southwest. In this example, the main door and the stove are in unfavorable locations. The remedies for these vary and depend on the fengshui masters. They can include changing the doormat color, moving the stove, or even moving the main door. Furthermore, the host should not put his bed at the southwest corner of the flat because it is inauspicious. On the other hand, as there is an obvious missing corner at *Seon*, which represents limbs and the eldest daughter (長女) of the

directions east and west.

⁵⁴ The calculations of trigram for male and for female are different. A woman who was born 1951 has a life trigram of *Kwan*.

⁵⁵ Another informant, however, said that there is no standardized identification of the sitting direction and facing direction. Different masters or groups have different ways to deal with them.

house. The eldest daughter living in this house may have health problems or people living in the flat may injure their limbs. For the Eight Mansions Branch, the auspicious and inauspicious spots are permanent and do not change with time.

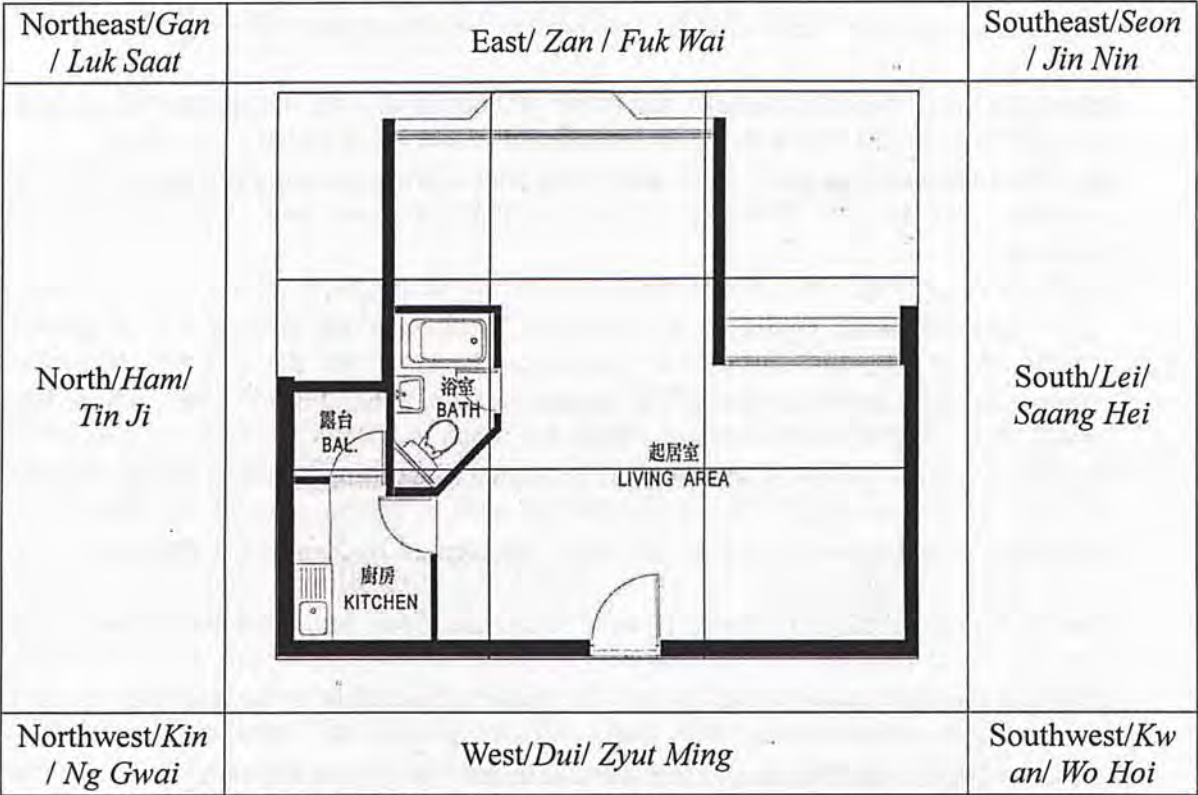


Figure 5.1 The house layout of the example.

The School of Cosmology—*Fei Sing* (飛星), or Flying Stars

Fei Sing (飛星), or Flying Stars is another way to calculate fengshui. The name “Flying Stars” refers to the moving of the *qi*, both good and bad. This school is based on the *Lo Shu* Square (Figure 5.2). The number on the grids representing various things like directions, trigrams, body parts and so on. These numbers move every year in a particular pattern and how the *qi* moves annually is shown on figure 5.3 below. An example to illustrate how the *qi* changes from one year to another is shown on figures 5.4 and 5.5. The numbers in the grids move so that we have different annual Flying Stars (流年飛星) every year. Moreover, the numbers stand for different things: “2”

and “5” represent negative *qi* that causes illness and calamity while “4”, “8” and “9” stands for positive *qi* (“e.g. “8” is for wealth).

| | | | | |
|------|-------|---|---|------|
| | South | | | |
| East | 4 | 9 | 2 | West |
| | 3 | 5 | 7 | |
| | 8 | 1 | 6 | |
| | North | | | |

Figure 5.2 *Lo Shu Square*

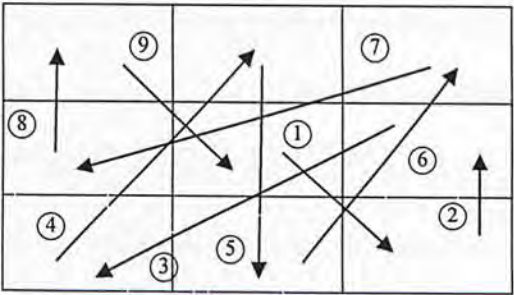


Figure 5.3 The pattern of the moving *qi*

| | | | | |
|------|-------|---|---|------|
| | South | | | |
| East | 9 | 5 | 7 | West |
| | 8 | 1 | 3 | |
| | 4 | 6 | 2 | |
| | North | | | |

Figure 5.4 The annual Flying Stars chart of 2008

| | | | | |
|------|-------|---|---|------|
| | South | | | |
| East | 8 | 4 | 6 | West |
| | 7 | 9 | 2 | |
| | 3 | 5 | 1 | |
| | North | | | |

Figure 5.5 The annual Flying Stars chart of 2009

However, according to this branch, the fengshui of a house is determined by other factors. One of them is the year when the house or building is built and the year confirms the *yun* (運) of the house. In Flying Stars fengshui, every cycle of *yun* of a house or of a place is 20 years. There are nine cycles in total. For example, 1984 to 2003 belongs to the seventh cycle and hence the number “7” is placed in the center (Figure 5.6). The other numbers are placed in the other grids accordingly. From 2004 to 2023, it is the eighth cycle of *yun* and the center of the square is “8” (Figure 5.7).

| | | | | |
|------|-------|---|---|------|
| | South | | | |
| | 6 | 2 | 4 | |
| East | 5 | 7 | 9 | West |
| | 1 | 3 | 8 | |
| | North | | | |

Figure 5.6 The Flying Stars chart of the 7th cycle

| | | | | |
|------|-------|---|---|------|
| | South | | | |
| | 7 | 3 | 5 | |
| East | 6 | 8 | 1 | West |
| | 2 | 4 | 9 | |
| | North | | | |

Figure 5.7 The Flying Stars chart of the 8th cycle

Apart from the time, the orientation of the house is also essential to determine the fengshui. Unlike the Eight Mansions Branch which divides the house into eight directions, the school of Flying Stars uses a more precise measurement: Twenty Four Points (二十四山⁵⁶): *Zi₂* (子), *Gwai* (癸), *Cau* (丑), *Gan* (艮), *Jan* (寅), *Gaap* (甲), *Maau* (卯), *Jyut* (乙), *San₄* (辰), *Seon* (巽), *Zi₆* (巳), *Bing* (丙), *Ng* (午), *Ding* (丁), *Mei* (未), *Kwan* (坤), *San₁* (申), *Gang* (庚), *Jau* (酉), *San₁* (辛)⁵⁷, *Seot* (戌), *Kin* (乾), *Hoi* (亥), *Jam* (壬). *Maau*, *Ng*, *Jau*, *Zi₂* are the east, south, west and north while *Seon*, *Kwan*, *Kin*, *Gan* are the southeast, southwest, northwest and northeast. The rest are the points in between these directions. Each of the points can be positive, or *yang*, and negative, or *yin*, in nature, which directs whether the *qi*, i.e. the numbers in the grids, move in an ascending or descending orders. Furthermore, these twenty four points are represented by the eight trigrams and every trigram stands for three points, such as the trigram of *Ham* (坎) includes the points *Jam*, *Zi₂* and *Gwai*. By using the fengshui compass, the precise direction can be identified. For instance, if a house was built in 1992 with the facing the east, or *Maau*, and sitting on the west, or *Jau*, that means the property has the *yun* of the 7th cycle and has the facing star of *Maau* and the sitting star of *Jau*, which both belong to *yin* and flying in descending order. As in the 7th cycle, 5 is

⁵⁶ 二十四山 literally means twenty four mountains.

⁵⁷ The pronunciations of the points 申 and 辛 are the same.

on the east direction and 9 is on the west. Therefore the facing star and sitting star, 5 and 9, are also placed at the center. The Flying Stars chart of this apartment is shown in the figure 5.8 below. In this graph, there are different numbers in each grid and various number combinations can stand for different things. For example, the spot containing 1 and 6 in the southeast grid as well as the northeast one are good for wealth, but the grid with 2 and 5 on the south and on the east are bad for health. Because the annual Flying Stars create new number combinations every year, people have to consult a fengshui practitioner (unless they know the rules themselves) to move and arrange their house decoration in order to maximize the benefits of the good locations and to avoid magnifying the bad ones. For instance, putting a fish bowls with a particular number and certain color of fishes at the auspicious position of wealth can help enhance fortune as the movement of the fishes “stirs” the positive *qi*. Conversely, placing a clock at the position of illness can excite the negative *qi* so that the bad fortune works like a clock throughout the day and night.

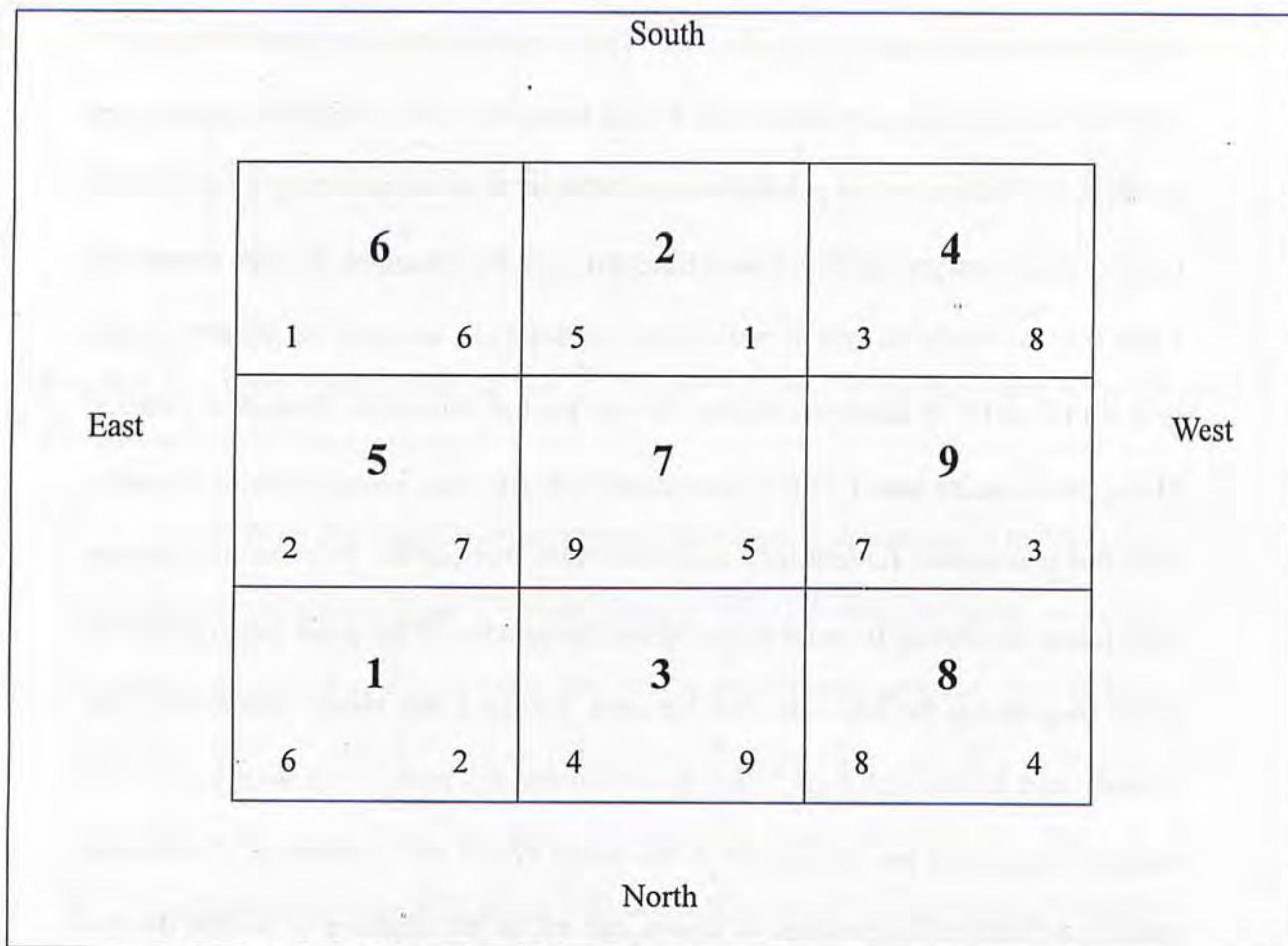


Figure 5.8 The Flying Stars chart of the example.

Fengshui Classes as Promotion Platform

Fengshui class is actually a platform for a fengshui teacher to sell his own products and services. Books, fengshui compasses, or fengshui courses organized by the instructors' centers can be purchased from the instructors in the lessons. Moreover, the teachers' fengshui or other services are "described" in the classes by themselves. Apart from teaching fengshui, there are a lot of selling activities going on during the lessons.

Although the teachers were teaching at the labor union where I did my fieldwork, they had their own companies organizing various courses about fengshui and other divinations at the same time. In the elementary interior fengshui course I took, the teacher gave all students a leaflet that introduced his own fengshui center and

the classes they provided. Twelve courses about face reading, palm reading, household fengshui, burial fengshui, date picking, the application of fengshui compass and so on were on the list. Some of these courses such as face and palm readings overlapped with the ones provided by the labor union. However, the prices of them made a difference. For example, the palm reading course held by the instructor's center, which consisted of twenty four lessons, cost 3600 dollars. The palm reading classes provided by the labor union were divided into elementary and intermediate levels, with twelve lessons for each class, and cost 650 and 710 dollars respectively. That means the total expense for the courses of the labor union was only approximately 40% of the one provided by the instructor's own school. Another example would be the fengshui class. The teacher promoted his Practical Course for Household Fengshui to us in the class. He suggested we could connect to the intermediate level after we had finished the elementary course in the labor union. The price was the same as the palm reading course—3600 dollars for twenty four lessons, i.e. one hundred and fifty per lesson. On the other hand, the labor union charged 710 dollars for a twelve-lesson intermediate fengshui course. It cost nearly sixty dollars for each lesson, 60% less than the teacher's "recommendation". In this way, the fengshui expert tried to attract the students who intended to go further to take a similar, but much more expensive, course in his center, instead of the labor union. The intermediate course offered by the labor union was briefly described in the course information, but the teacher did not give us the course outline or details about the private class. He simply told us we could further our fengshui studies by taking his private intermediate course. So students needed to decide what they would take from the brief introduction as well as the prices.

Promoting courses that were not provided in the labor union was also seen in the class. Another fengshui instructor, who taught me in the intermediate interior

fengshui class, advertised an advanced level fengshui course in the lessons and the course was taught by the instructor's classmate from the same master (師兄). The teacher emphasized that the new course would start from where our intermediate course ended. Due to the limitation of the size of the classroom at the teacher's office, only fourteen students could be accepted in the new class. The new class had to be paid on a monthly basis and it cost 450 dollars per month for one lesson a week. As there was no fengshui class of similar level was provided by the labor union and since seats were limited, students in my class were enthusiastic about the new course and the class was soon full. More than ten students showed their interest but could not get a seat in the new class. The teacher then announced another advanced level class would be organized in three month, after the next term's intermediate fengshui course. It seemed that the teacher seized the opportunity and opened the fengshui classes of advanced level to attract students to take it as soon as they finished the intermediate level course in the labor union.

Beside the courses at the teachers' private centers, different things were sold in the class. The teacher of the elementary course advertised his publication, a book about household fengshui, in the lessons and even bought some copies to the class and sold them to the students. In order to stimulate the sales of the book, the teacher even used the book as teaching material in the same lesson he sold the books. In fact, his book was not a very popular fengshui publication; it was not one that people could see in newspaper stalls and convenience stores. It was not even found in some chain book shops in Hong Kong. Apart from his own fengshui center, the fengshui classes could probably be the most direct and effective platform for the instructor to promote his publication. Another thing the students could purchase from fengshui teachers was fengshui compasses. The intermediate course teacher told us that he could buy the

fengshui compasses for us and this could make sure the tool we used was a good quality one since the qualities of the fengshui compasses sold in the market were uneven. The quality would be guaranteed if we bought it from him. He sold a six inch fengshui compass at seven hundred dollars. However, the prices of these compasses sold in the market varied. It depended on the origins, brands and sizes. Also, some might charge more for compasses that have been consecrated (開光) by masters. Most of the students in the class got their fengshui compasses from the teacher.

Fengshui experts selling their own services in lessons was almost routine. By telling their interactions with the clients and the cases they had, they established themselves as efficacious and responsible. For instance, one of the teachers asked in the class what the students thought made for a good fengshui consultation. By describing different steps in the procedure, the master actually presented the students that he knew how to do the fengshui survey. In addition, he described the additional services he gave after the survey, which other fengshui practitioners did not usually provide.

Adaptations of Fengshui Classes into Modern Society

The contents taught in the classes were not new. The School of Forms was founded in the 9th century while the School of Cosmology began in the 11th century. Centuries after the founding of both schools of fengshui, fengshui still interests people and is attractive enough for them to take the courses about it. The characteristics of the fengshui classes I signed up for may help this ancient knowledge to maintain its attractiveness to the people in the modern society.

From the courses I took, I have learnt more about the School of Cosmology than the School of Forms. It seemed that the School of Forms was not really

emphasized. Although in the elementary class the teacher refused to teach anything about the cosmic calculations and claimed the principles of these calculations would be taught in his intermediate course, this may have been his excuse for the disorganization of his course and the lack of actual observation outside the classroom for the students. Or it could be interpreted as he kept something more important as his secret weapon in order to attract people to take his next class. For the intermediate class, the instructor spent only one sixth of the course on the School of Forms and the rest was all about the School of Cosmology. Apart from the classes for which I signed up, among the three books including *Zaak Wan San Ngon* (宅運新案), *Jyun Hung Bei Zi* (玄空秘旨) and *Pik Ging Zaap* (關經集) which would be used in the advanced level course organized by the instructor's own centre, the first two concerned the School of Cosmology while the last one was about the School of Forms. The quantity of teaching materials showed that the School of Cosmology would be the focus of the advanced course. According to Stephan Feuchtwang, the School of Forms can allow the fengshui masters and users have more freedom to interpret the fengshui of a place and hence to fulfill individual's need more easily because the identifications of the shapes of things in the environment are not that rigid. On the contrary, the rules of various cosmic calculations of the School of Cosmology restrict people from constructing their own meanings and explanations (Feuchtwang 1982:114). If, as Feuchtwang mentioned, the School of Forms is something that can let the fengshui masters and fengshui users interpret the reality more freely, should the teachers pay more attention to the School of Forms?

Of course one could argue that the courses I signed up were "Interior Fengshui", which were supposed to only be about the fengshui inside the house. The School of Forms is more useful for dealing with things outside the houses, and less

useful for interior fengshui. This was my expectation when I signed up the classes. However, as various informants mentioned that the landscapes and shapes of the external environment are influential to the fengshui of a property, should the instructors teach us more about the School of Forms? After all, the fengshui inside the flat is directly affected by the outer landscapes. I think the students should have learnt more from the classes what they can do within the house to counter the fengshui harms from outside.

One of the explanations for the uneven proportion of the lessons is that nowadays people have fewer choices to deal with the outer environment of their property. It is not that we do not have the classic fengshui symbols like mountains or rivers. But mountains and rivers are less prominent in the urban living area, and we have many more high buildings and roads to act as modern fengshui symbols, which continue to influence our landscape. In the past, people might have their own choice of the sites of their houses. They had more freedom to create their own landscape for fengshui uses. Most of the Hong Kong people today live in condominiums and share common facilities with the neighbors. People do not have much say over the landscapes outside their property. As mentioned in the example in the elementary course, the classmate could not go to clean up the bumpy roof of the neighboring building himself in order to reduce the fengshui harm. The lady could not remove the tree obstructing her window. In many situations people have no choice in their outer environment. Nowadays the external environment is less manageable even to people who equipped with the knowledge of landscape fengshui. Of course people can move out from a house with bad fengshui. However, it is not really practical. The other option to this is to put more effort on something that can be controlled—the area within one's house; therefore, the cosmic calculations seem to be a better way to deal

with the modern living environment. Ole Bruun suggested that when the idea of fengshui was accepted by the West, it focused more on the interior settings than external landscape (Bruun 2008:159). We can see, however, that it is not only Westerners who apply fengshui mainly indoors. From the fengshui classes, I can see that the situation in Hong Kong is similar. This suggests that the focus on the interior is more a characteristic of modern urban society, rather than of the West.

Secondly, the application of the School of Cosmology on interior fengshui can allow people to address an individual's problem. Bruun thought that the branches of Flying Stars and of Eight Mansions⁵⁸ can help people make use of different parts of the house according to the auspicious and inauspicious spots, in addition to individual's desires (Bruun 2008:160). From the teaching of the classes, people can learn how to deal with the individual parts of an apartment in order to fulfill different needs of various family members. For example, in Flying Stars fengshui, the number "4" is the location of *Man Ceong* (文昌), i.e. the *qi* of study, and it is particularly useful to the students. Families with children in schools can boost the luck of study by putting a yellow vase with four bamboos at that spot. On the other hand, people can ignore it if they do not need the fortune of study. It is similar in the Eight Mansions fengshui. For instance, the *Seon* trigram represents the direction of Southeast, so in an apartment that is basically square but is missing the southeast corner, the eldest daughter, limbs and the luck of study would face problems. However, if you are not a student or the eldest daughter in the house, the impact brought by the missing part is smaller. At the same time, if you are the elder daughter and need the luck of study, you have to pay more attention and find a remedy for it. People have various desires. Singers and actors need better relationship with others so that they have more fans. Gamblers want to have the

⁵⁸ Bruun called the Branch of Eight Mansions as *Bagua* School.

luck of ill-gotten wealth. Married couples may wish to have a baby. Moreover, with the understanding of the auspicious and inauspicious parts in a house, people can have more control by rearranging the interior setting. Special auspicious spots can be left for members with certain needs. Individuals' needs and desires can thus be fulfilled by a more direct, controllable means, allowing for a better use of the limited space.

Another reason for the emphasis of the School of Cosmology in the classes is that the cosmic calculations can bring up a more "scientific" image for fengshui. Being vague is good for fengshui practitioners to give their consultations and they can make up more explanations for various fengshui settings, which help to fit in different situations of the clients. However, as Hong Kong people nowadays stress transparency, science and "modern explanations", giving ambiguous answers and subjective interpretations of forms and shapes can be challenged easily. Is a "sharp mountain" really sharp or is it rather "flat"? Is a building in front of the window like a knife or a chopstick? The cosmic calculations of fengshui, no matter which branches, can help the ancient knowledge to merge into the modern society by providing a more "scientific" answer to people's life mysteries through a "systematic calculation". By teaching these cosmic calculations, the teachers show the steps of doing them like the mathematics exercise and reveal the "scientific" side of fengshui, and hence put themselves as a place of the instructors of a discipline of "science". In fact, my other fengshui practitioner informants kept emphasizing that fengshui is not something mysterious and people did not require any special talents to learn it. They told me anyone could do it as long as they follow the steps. This may help to remove the image of superstition from fengshui. It is not difficult to imagine that this school of fengshui helps fengshui itself as well as the fengshui specialists to transform from the image of "mysterious fraud" in the past into the "scientific experts" in the present. From the

courses, I could see how the teachers put the fengshui in a way that can be accepted by the people who pursued “systematic” and “scientific” explanations in the modern world.

Beside the course about the fengshui courses, the labor union organizes other courses such as elementary and intermediate courses of Flying Stars Fengshui, Household and Landscape Fengshui, Fengshui Applications on Living Households and so on. Among all the fengshui classes, the elementary courses of Interior Fengshui and Flying Stars Fengshui are comparatively more popular since the union provides several classes, taught by different fengshui specialists, for each every term, while only one class for the rest of the fengshui courses. This can reflect that people in Hong Kong are more keen on learning fengshui about interior environment and the “systematic calculation” of fengshui. By learning the skills, the fengshui students do not need the fengshui masters anymore and they can change the fengshui setting in their own places according to their particulars targets.

Conclusion

Fengshui classes showed us people trying to maximize their own benefits with limited resources. The fengshui instructors grasped their chances to promote themselves and their services to the students. At the same time, the students tried to concentrate on learning the skills. With the knowledge they learnt, they can arrange the fengshui settings in their own places without the help of the fengshui masters because the fengshui of the Eight Mansions branch and of Flying Stars branch require less specialists’ interpretations. Aiming at the personal desires, people can arrange the limited resources and remedies for themselves within the interior space in which they can control. After all, people living in the urban setting do not have many choices

about their living environment. The fengshui class and branches of fengshui taught in the classes allowed the students more choices to gain a sense of control within the scarce resources, making the ancient knowledge relevant and able to fit into modern Hong Kong society.

Chapter 6 – Fengshui Users:

Manipulation of the Limited Environment

People who deliberately use fengshui may not be the majority in Hong Kong, but they are not rare. How do these people use fengshui in their living environment? Why do they use this practice? Is there any particular things or problems they want to get or achieve by using fengshui? Are their practices all the same? In fact, by manipulation of the interior spaces, people try to achieve what they want at different stages of lives. Rich people may have more spaces or choices, but it does not mean people with lower economic status are excluded from the fengshui world. In this chapter, I am going to peek into fengshui users' world.

Manipulation of Interior Environment

Living environment affects how much fengshui can be used to manipulate the environment. Informants living in different types of housing and places have different ways of applying of fengshui. For those who live in a bigger property, they have more space to manipulate for fengshui purposes.

Mary and John got married in 2006 and bought an apartment in a low density private housing estate in the western New Territories just before marriage. There are apartments and houses in the estate and my informants live in an apartment on the ground floor with their maid and dogs. Due to the lack of time between the purchase and the wedding, they kept most of the interior setting and furniture from the previous owner. The changes they made were all advised by their fengshui master, Richard Yu, who has also been a personal friend of John for more than twenty years. Mary explained:

The major change is the lamps (Figure 6.1). The original ceiling lamps in the living room and dining room were replaced with the ones with lights facing upward. Richard said it was to avoid the discomfort created by the direct lighting. Also, there were problems with the lamps in the bathrooms as they looked like white candles (Figure 6.2), which symbolized funerals. However, we only changed the ones in the master room's bathroom. In fact, the ones in the other bathroom are rarely used. Other than the lamps, Richard put some golden pothos⁵⁹ in our bedroom, study, kitchen and living room. The plant in the kitchen is for health as kitchen is where the food comes from. The one in the living room is put facing the long corridor so that the killing *qi* can be eliminated and hence protect all who live here, humans and animals. As for the ones in the bedroom and study, they can enhance learning.... He [Richard] has marked the ideal position of our bed with the transparent tape on the floor. In fact, he gave some other advice but we did not follow all. For example, he asked us to remove the shelf in our bedroom but we did not.



Figure 6.1 Lamps facing upward



Figure 6.2 Candle shape lights

⁵⁹ Golden Pothos, or devil's ivy is called 黃金葛 or 萬年青 in Chinese.



Figure 6.3 Pool outside the courtyard



Figure 6.4 Golden pothos in the kitchen

Low density estates in Hong Kong are not common in Hong Kong and this implies a high economic status. For the couple, their bedroom is big enough to allow their bed to be set in an ideal orientation, which is marked by the tape, and the kitchen is spacious that they can put a vase of medium size on the workbench (Figure 6.4). The fengshui setting of their house is not limited by the factor of space.

Ms. Lam has lived in a house in a big, low density private estate in the eastern New Territories with her husband, son and domestic helper. She once worked in a trading company and is now a housewife. When she and her husband bought their house of 1850 square feet about ten years ago, they had sought fengshui advice for the renovation and decoration and they had annual consultations for two years. The fengshui specialist they consulted was a friend of Ms. Lam's former colleague. She stated while she introduced her house setting:

My fengshui master gave us a lot of "don'ts". For example, we moved the front door because the staircase should not be seen from the door. We do not plant any tree in the front courtyard and no red hibiscus flower [big red flower] and plumeria [egg flower] in the backyard. No picture with kinetic

patterns should be shown in the study. Also, people should not sleep right under the beam. Therefore, we did a suspended ceiling in the master bedroom so that it now looks like no beam at all.

I do not really remember why the reasons behind those suggestions. The master said "good fengshui means the harmony between human, house and the environment." I think it is fine as long as we feel comfortable. We have not consulted the master after the first three years [that they moved there]. When my son was born, we just changed the guest room to my son's room without seeking the fengshui specialist's advice. We decorated it according to our own ideas.

In this case, the space is not a limitation to how the user applies fengshui. The informant could even move the front door for a better fengshui. This is not something people living in normal residential buildings can do.

Cherry and her family live in the same estate as Ms. Lam. She is a housewife and her husband is a businessman. Their fengshui master not only takes care of the fengshui of the house but of her husband's company. Cherry claimed most of the interior design was done by themselves and they followed the fengshui master's advice if it is "convenient":

We consulted the fengshui master before the decoration and we changed a few things when we moved in. First it was the front door of the house. He used his fengshui compass and found two better positions for us [to open the door] and both of them were not parallel to the wall. We chose the one which looked less awkward because now the angle between the wall and door is less than 15 degree. It looks like slightly protruding but it is okay for us. Moreover, there is a "dead position" between the kitchen and the dining room. The master said we should not walk through the position to go in and out of the kitchen. Therefore, we have blocked it by building a short concrete wall there acting as a kitchen bench. My master also reminded us our study in the second floor should not be used as a bedroom or people would get sick... There is a beam in the master bedroom. The former owner did level the ceiling to "hide" the beam but we undid it because it made the room look smaller. We just do not sleep right under the beam to avoid being affected... We follow the [fengshui] suggestions if it is "convenient". For example, he suggested us to have only six fishes in the fish pond in the front courtyard. However, the man who built the pond for us gave us a bag of goldfish after the installation. There were more than 15 fishes and we kept them all. After some time some fishes died gradually and now we follow the advice and keep six fishes only... He suggested us to put a copper elephant in our backyard. We did not have one at the beginning. However, one time when we went travelling in Bali and saw this [the copper elephant], we called the master and asked if the size of the ornament mattered. He told us the main point was

“visible size”. Therefore we bought the elephant ornament from Indonesia.

The fengshui master had seen the fengshui setting of previous owner and he thought that there were two main mistakes. The first one was about the “dead position” because the previous owner painted there red and put some ornaments there. This would move the negative *qi* there. The other problem was they used room in the second floor [Cherry’s study] as a bedroom.

In fact, moving front door, having spare room, preventing sleeping under the beam which is at the centre of the ceiling involve a lot of space. It is only possible for the fengshui users who live in spacious property.

Fengshui users have different ways to manipulate their living environment. Even those who do not have many choices about their living environment still have their ways of changing their limited space. The following informants refused my request of home visits because their homes were either “too small” or “too messy”.

Ah-lung, a decoration worker in his mid thirty, lives with his parents in an apartment in building over 40 years old. It is about 400 square feet and it is located in western Kowloon, surrounded by the buildings of similar age. The apartment was bought by his parents over 30 years ago. Ah-lung has started using fengshui since his mid twenties when he started to be a decoration apprentice. At first he only put some coins or ornaments in different directions in order to boost his fortune. In 2001, his sister got married and moved out from the apartment. Afterward his family wanted to renovate the place and Ah-lung decided to seek some fengshui advice for the decoration. In fact, he has learned some fengshui knowledge through his working experience but he sought the suggestions from his former boss, a decoration contractor who studied fengshui for years. Ah-lung said:

Basically the whole renovation included re-painting all the walls and re-paving the floor... In fact, we did not change much for the setting of the living room, kitchen, bathroom and my parents’ bedroom because of two reasons. They were either limited by its building structure or their orientations were acceptable. Moreover, my parents did not want to change much as they were getting old and they were afraid of not getting used to it... Before my sister moved out, I was sleeping in the living room. Now the room

is mine. My boss changed the orientation of my bed from perpendicular to the windows to parallel to them. It was the biggest move of the furniture among all since my room, or my flat is not big.

Moving the household setting can be a way to achieve better fengshui. In Ah-lung's case, moving furniture was not really an option for the fengshui setting because his place is too small for the re-arrangement. He could only consider other solutions for the fengshui problems in his apartment.

Rebecca lives in a Home Ownership Scheme (HOS)⁶⁰ flat in Eastern Kowloon with her mother and younger brother. The apartment is around 600 square feet with three bedrooms. In her early 30s, Rebecca works in the Hong Kong SAR Government as a middle-rank frontline civil servant. Her family gave up the public rental flat in the same district and bought the second hand HOS flat three years ago. Rebecca says she is just "interested" in fengshui but her mother is immersed in it. At the time when they were living in the public rental housing, they did not seek advice from a fengshui practitioner but her mother placed various ornaments in different positions for fengshui purposes. When they bought the flat, her mother decided to consult a fengshui specialist, who was introduced by her mother's friend, before the decoration. At the time of the consultation, only Rebecca's mother and her friend were there because Rebecca and her brother were at work. Rebecca quoted what her mother said:

The master said the orientation of the house was fine. However, he suggested my mom and me to switch our rooms. In the original plan, my mother's room was on the left of the living room while my brother's and mine were on the right... The master suggested painting my room pink to boost the romance fortune. Apart from that, he did not give much advice as he thought our plan was fine. Maybe my mother and I subconsciously used some fengshui knowledge to plan the household setting.

While Rebecca and her family lived in an apartment which belonged to the

⁶⁰ "Home Ownership Scheme (HOS)" is designed to assist residents to buy their own home. HOS flats are subsidized public housing and the buying, selling and mortgage of these flats are subject to certain restrictions." (Hong Kong Housing Authority 2006)

government, they did not bother to hire a fengshui practitioner. They hired one for professional advice once they got their own property and they sought advice before the decoration started, and this helped them to maximize the benefits from the master's suggestions for the limited space. At least they could make a change of rooms before they bought all the furniture.

Mr. Cheung, a 59-year-old car park security guard, lives in an old public housing estate in Eastern Kowloon with his wife. He had been working in printing industry for almost thirty years but his own company closed down in 1997 and he declared bankruptcy. He lost all of his assets including his apartment. After that he and his wife lived on the government subsidy and moved to a private rental room. In 2000, Mr. Cheung got a 200-square-foot public rental flat. He joined the employee retraining course and got a job of car park security guard and started to pay attention to fengshui in the same year. He got his fengshui knowledge from books, newspapers, television and radio programmes. He described how he did the fengshui setting in his flat:

You may wonder how I do the fengshui setting such a small flat. I have to say I am not a professional but I have kept changing the fengshui setting every year since 2001. Since my door faces west, this year I have stuck six copper coins on the door frame in order to avoid the bad luck. You know, "come in and go out safe"⁶¹...I have put a bottle of water on the southwest corner of the apartment, which is on the upper bunk, to boost the wealth fortune. For prevention of sickness, I have placed some old keys on the television cabinet at the south of the flat.

Although the living environment is restricted, my informant came up with other fengshui remedies instead of moving things in the house.

People in higher economic status have more choices about their living environment as they can afford more than the people with less money. Also, they have more living spaces allowing them to move their furniture or to have a different household layout for fengshui purposes. Therefore, it looks like people who can afford

⁶¹ Original words in Chinese: 出入平安

to live in a bigger property have a greater degree of manipulation of the environment.

Dealing with the Outer Environment

People use fengshui not only to deal with their own living area but the environment outside their residence. This is because the outer landscape can bring potential benefits or harms. However, no matter where one lives, the things outside one's house can be uncontrollable.

Mary's apartment is on the ground floor with a small courtyard. Across the fence of the courtyard is the outdoor swimming pool of the estate (Figure 6.3). Mary explained how important the swimming pool is:

One of the reasons we bought this flat is the swimming pool. It is not because we like swimming but the pool of water. Richard told us the pool of water symbolized money which is good for us. We asked the management office if there is water in the pool in winter before we bought the property. They said they would not dry the pool in winter. That means we can keep the money for the whole year without being dried up. However, last winter we found that the pool was dried up. John talked to the management office about this. We will see if it is still dried up in the coming winter.

Although the pool of water is an important fengshui symbol to John and Mary, it belongs to the estate and it is dried up during winter for maintenance. The original fengshui plan of my informants cannot be carried out.

The view from Rebecca's bedroom brings her potential benefit. She told me the reason behind the switch of rooms:

My mother told the fengshui master that she was worried about my "future" since I was single. The master suggested the switch of rooms because my room [her mother's original room] faces a roundabout, which can help the fortune of romance [peach flower fortune].

There is one condition for the roundabout in order to make the fengshui place works: the rate of flow of vehicles cannot be low. This is not something that my informant or the fengshui master can guarantee.

Not all the people get something they want from the outer environment. Sometimes the landscape outside one's residence brings people troubles. Ms. Lam shared her story:

One interesting advice is about the view outside my bedroom. As the master thought the houses in front of us were like people kneeling down begging for help, he suggested us to block it by growing some plants with thorns in the balcony.

"Begging for help" can be seen as positive or negative, depending on the context. Ms. Lam's husband is a doctor in a public hospital. In their view, "begging for help" from them is not a good phenomenon as it implied more people are getting illnesses and Ms. Lam's husband is getting more work to do without additional pay. They cannot stop people from needing the help, but they can block people from "begging" for assistance. Therefore, they planted some bougainvillea, a thorny plant, in the balcony to prevent people getting to them.

The electricity pylon seems to be an inauspicious fengshui symbol. From Cherry's bedroom, several electricity pylons along the hillside can be seen. Her fengshui practitioner suggested her to hang a copper wind chime in the window in order to prevent the killing *qi* from affecting the health of the family. She thinks the distance between the pylons and her house is far enough, compared to other houses in the estate, so that it is easily solved by a window chime and no serious health problem will be created.

Outer environment can block people from getting what they need. The neighborhood of Ah-lung's building is one of the examples:

My boss said "money comes if light comes"⁶². However, since our building is closely surrounded by other buildings, it is difficult to get the natural light entering our flat. Therefore we had picked the pale pink tiles for the floor and pale yellow paint for the walls. Also, we installed the white fluorescent lamps. This combination made the apartment look brighter.

⁶² Original words in Chinese: 光到財到

As his place has not much natural light, Ah-lung has to make the compensation for that so that the money is not lost. This is the only thing he can do when the natural environment is not what he wants.

These examples show that people do not always have control over the external environment. When people cannot move or manipulate the things outside of their living spaces, they do something within their properties in order to solve the fengshui problems and hence gain a sense of control.

The Timing of Fengshui Consultations

To create a better living environment, my informants have different ways to use fengshui. Some people use fengshui before they have got the apartment but some of them apply it after they have lived in the same place for years. Some people spend a few thousands while some use less than one hundred dollars. Moreover, to certain informants a fengshui consultation is a one-time thing but others keep changing household fengshui setting periodically.

John and Mary brought their fengshui specialist, Richard, with them when they went viewing properties in the New Territories. At the beginning, the couple only looked for the flats in Hong Kong Island and Kowloon. However, they found it very difficult because most of the estates they viewed did not allow them to keep their dogs. Then they started the house hunting in the New Territories. Mary explained why they asked Richard to go with them:

We asked him to come with us at the first time because he lives nearby [the property they viewed]. That was a two-storey village house with a big courtyard and car park. It cost three million dollars. I liked it but Richard said it was not good for us so that we did not buy that one. The second one we saw [with Richard] was an apartment in another district in the New Territories. We liked it and the fengshui was good. However, when we wanted to view it again, it was sold. The one we are living now was the third

one. As Richard thought the fengshui and the household setting were acceptable, we could keep most of the original renovation and did not need to change much before we moved in. However, the main reason we bought this flat was because it cost 2.6 million dollars. It was pretty cheap compared to properties with similar size as well as environment... Viewing property with a fengshui specialist was quite embarrassing. We tried to hide his real identity.

In fact, we do not see it as a formal fengshui consultation. To us, Richard is just a friend who knows fengshui. We asked him to "take a look" and we did not pay him formally but gave him a red packet because we did not want to take advantage from him. After that we have not asked for another fengshui consultation. As a friend, Richard visits us sometimes and brings us golden pothos in case ours are withered.

Although they started to consult a fengshui master at the early stage of house hunting, fengshui was not the only consideration for them to buy the property. The price of the flat was the most important factor.

Cherry also had tried to go viewing properties with the fengshui practitioner.

However, the house she is living now is not one of the examples. She explained:

Before we bought this house, we had tried to go [viewing properties] with our fengshui master. We had once seen an apartment which we liked a lot and the fengshui was good. At the end we did not buy it because the price of the property was not right for us. Our master later told us "you can go viewing by yourselves. If you think it is the right one, it is the right one." It was solely our decision for buying the house we are living in.

I do not really remember how much we paid the fengshui master but it should be around ten thousand dollars. I know he charges others by the area of the property. He did not sell us other fengshui ornaments. We bought the things such as the chime and the elephant ourselves.

Similar to Mary and John's case, Cherry did hire a fengshui specialist for property hunting, the factor of budget remained to be the influential factor when she and her family decided to buy a house.

Some informants do not think of taking a fengshui practitioner with them for house hunting. Rebecca is one of them. She stated:

We have not thought of hiring a fengshui specialist until we bought the flat. Why should we need one when we were living in the public rental apartment? My mother placed different things for fengshui purposes by herself but we did not seriously consider seeking professional fengshui advice at that time. Those things my mother used were not expensive. For example, crystal beans, copper coins and small plants did not cost much... The master I hired for my

own flat cost me 3,888 dollars, which was a “friendship price”. We got one [fengshui master] because the flat is ours. I know some people take the fengshui specialists with them for viewing properties. We did not do that because the budget was our first consideration. Moreover, we only looked for the apartment in the same district. We are familiar with the neighborhood. I would not buy an over-budget flat or flat in other district just because of good fengshui... We do not do the annual fengshui consultation. My mother is responsible for the annual change. We buy the Chinese horoscope almanac⁶³ and she reads through it. She will set the things according to the guide every year.

Fengshui masters cannot solve the problems of client's budget. In her example, Rebecca tried to get a professional fengshui consultation after she got her own flat.

The case of Ms. Lam is similar to Rebecca's. She bought the house before they sought the advice from fengshui master. After she moved into the house, she asked the fengshui master for an annual consultation twice. Since her fengshui master was introduced by her friend, she did not pay him formally. Instead, she gave him a red packet of one thousand dollars and treated him dinner each time.

Mr. Cheung has never consulted a fengshui practitioner but he has followed the Chinese horoscope almanac to re-position the things in his flat every year since 2000. He thought:

I do not have money to hire a fengshui master. Even though they are introduced by friends or relatives, you still have to give them red packets. It costs at least five hundred dollars. I earn about six thousand dollars per month. How can I afford that? The things I used for fengshui setting are all cheap things. Six copper coins cost about fifteen and the bottle of water costs almost nothing.

I have asked my neighbour about the previous tenants of the flat. They moved out because they bought a new apartment. Well, that means the fengshui of this flat is not problematic. Otherwise the former tenants would not be that rich to buy a flat. Of course I am not totally satisfied with the environment, such as noise from the highway outside. But what can I do? What can a fengshui master do to deal with it? I cannot afford to move somewhere else.

People practising or using fengshui in different economic status have their own ways to cope with the limitations of space and resources. Although it is not major

⁶³ Original words in Chinese: 流年運程書; about forty to sixty dollars per one.

reason, fengshui, in some examples, is involved as a consideration for spending millions of dollars on a property.

What Fengshui is supposed to Achieve

As good fengshui brings fortune to people, what particular things do my informants want to achieve through using fengshui? When I asked this question to my informants, I got a common answer—"peace". However, different informants have different definitions of "peace". For some people, the action of the fengshui consultation makes them feel at ease. For the others, they have particular goals to achieve through fengshui.

Mary, for example, told me she consulted a fengshui master because she wanted to have peace for the family. With her past experience, we may understand the "peace" she referred to:

Before getting married, I rented a flat in Hong Kong Island by myself. I was depressed for a period of time when I was living there. I wondered if there was any problem with my flat which affected my health. Hence when we decided to get married and looked for the new property, we wanted to consult the professionals in order to make sure the apartment we bought was fine and brought us peaceful life.

Here Mary's "peace" implied health. Since she suffered from depression, she wanted to have a safe environment which would not lead to health problems. Furthermore, the advice of a professional fengshui practitioner could relieve her anxiety of living in a house which was "dangerous".

Another informant, Cherry, also told me through the fengshui setting she wanted to have a peaceful life for the family. She stated: "In fact, we have never encountered something bad. We don't need anything extra. We just want to stay like this." Ms. Lam gave a similar response in the interview. With the stability in health, economic background and familial situation, they prefer to stay the way they are.

Fengshui, to both of them, is the instrument helping them to maintain their quality of life.

On the other hand, other than “peace”, some people have clear goals when they apply fengshui. Mr. Wong and Mrs. Wong married in 2006 and they bought their own apartment in the eastern New Territories in 2007. Before the marriage, they had been cohabiting since 1998 and they lived in a private rental flat on Hong Kong Island. They got married because they wanted to have a baby. Mrs. Wong was 4-month pregnant at the time of being interviewed and the couple is expecting their first baby in February 2009. To them, fengshui has been used for various purposes at different stages of life.

Mrs. Wong told me:

When we were living in the rental flat, our fengshui setting was mainly for money and career. Of course we also cared about health, harmony and other stuff. We put different fengshui ornaments in different directions in order to enhance our career development and wealth, both direct wealth and indirect wealth. I remember one year we bought a new fish tank and put it in the position of wealth in my flat. At the same time I placed a “water-absorbing” elephant (吸濕大笨象)⁶⁴ ornament on the desk in my office and he [Mr. Wong] put some yellow crystal beans and plants in his office. In that year, he got promoted and a significant salary increment while I got a new job with better salary as well as prospect. We also had some “indirect wealth” from the stock market. It was a prosperous year since the money we made that year was enough for the down payment of an apartment.

After moving to our new home, our fengshui focus has shifted. In the early 2008 we did a fengshui setting facilitating the conceiving of a baby. It worked. In fact, we are now in stable economic status and we want to have a complete family. My mother-in-law will be happier if this baby is a boy as she really wants a grandson. For me I am happy as long as it is healthy. I think being pregnant changes me. Now my baby is my first priority. I only want my baby to be healthy and happy. I think people have different needs at different stages of life.

Mrs. Wong is not the only mother who cares about her child. Rebecca’s mother is concerned about the future of her son and daughter. Their household fengshui setting, reflects a mother’s hopes. Rebecca elaborated:

⁶⁴ “Water-absorbing” elephant (吸濕大笨象) is a brand of dehumidifying box. My informant uses an elephant ornament to symbolize the “sucking” of money, which is like elephants sucking water up by the trunk.

My mother is definitely worried about my future. I am now 33 years old and I am single. What do you think? My mother is traditional and she is afraid that I will be single for my whole life. The fengshui master told my mother switching our rooms would help me for the fortune of romance. He also told my mother I would have a late marriage. My mother seemed a bit relieved about it. She had tried to worship different deities to seek their help for my fortune of romance...As for my brother, he kept switching jobs in the first two years after he graduated from the university. He had been an insurance salesperson, a substitute teacher, a contract executive officer in a private education centre and so on. I don't remember them all. That was why my mother asked the master to help my brother with this aspect. She thought a boy should have a stable job and earn enough money so that he could establish his own family later.

At this moment, my brother has been working in a bank for almost two years. He is a permanent staff and he gets a satisfactory pay and welfare from the bank. My mother is satisfied with that too. For me, I am still single. My mother suggested a blind date to me several times. I refused and told her to be patient. In fact, I am not that desperate for a boyfriend or husband. I am satisfied with my life and I enjoy being single at this moment. For the aspect of romance, it "follows the destiny"⁶⁵...By using fengshui, I just want my family to be healthy and happy.

Although the mother and the daughter have different expectations from the household fengshui setting, it seems both of them get something they want from it.

For another informant Ah-lung, his fengshui setting is closely related to his personal desire and responsibility. He stated:

Money is important. There is no doubt about it. Of course I care about my parents. I care about their health as they are getting older. However, I am the one who financially supports the family. If I can make more money, their life will be better. For example, my father was diagnosed with gall bladder stones two or three years ago. The doctor suggested him to have a surgery of gall bladder removal as soon as possible. I decided to take my father to a private hospital since I did not want him to wait for the public hospital. It cost about seventy thousand dollars. This was much more expensive than the public hospital. As long as I could afford, I am willing to pay more because it is my father's life. If I did not have money, my father would suffer for a longer time...It is my decision to do the fengshui setting at home. As long as we can have a good fengshui, why not share it with the family?

This year I have put a fish tank and a bat ornament at the positions of direct wealth and indirect wealth respectively, hoping that both fortunes would be enhanced. My income from my work has been stable this year. But you know, being decoration worker in summer is hard, especially in hot days...Of course I want to put less effort and get more...I like gambling. Mark Six, mahjong, horse racing are all my interests. I go to Macau [casino]

⁶⁵ Original words in Chinese: 隨緣

too, maybe several times per year. I do want to get some more indirect wealth from these. I won twenty dollars⁶⁶ from Mark Six in March this year. Other than that, I have not got any money from other games, maybe my indirect wealth will come later this year.

I think my purposes of using fengshui are money and health...Wife? Don't you need money to get a wife?

Besides household applications, fengshui is used in the working environment by some informants. Mr. and Mrs. Wong's use in office to boost their wealth and career, moreover, both John and Rebecca have their fengshui settings or ornaments in their workplaces respectively. The fengshui setting of the company is done by another fengshui specialist and is paid by the company because "it is to maintain the wealth and growth of the owners of the company." Working with a bunch of incompetents and a difficult lady, John has put some plants in his office to "make life easier".

Human relationship at work seems to be another topic which fengshui can help.

Rebecca shares a similar view:

I have two plants and some crystal beans in my office...Being a frontline civil servant is hard and it seems to be getting harder. Nowadays Hong Kong citizens are more demanding. My colleagues and I are sometimes yelled at with something like "we, Hong Kong citizens, are your boss"...Within the office the atmosphere is not particularly harmonious. You know the government culture: "If you work more, more things will go wrong; if you do nothing, nothing will go wrong". When the co-workers around you try to push their works to others, you have to protect yourselves even though you are a responsible person. In the working environment, human relationship is always a difficult task.

Leo, a salesperson in an advertising agency, has practised fengshui for almost five years. He said he used fengshui because he wanted something "general"—health, career, money. To him, people all have the same motive for using fengshui:

It is because you have desire, you want to get something. It can be many things like health, career, money, romantic relationship, human relationship and so on. These are all desires. If you have no desire, why do you bother to do this [fengshui]?

We can see that the emphasis of fengshui application is no longer on the whole

⁶⁶ People who can pick three out of the six drawn numbers in Mark Six will be given the 7th prize, twenty dollars (Hong Kong Jockey Club 2008)

village or on whole lineage. It can be on a nuclear family or even on an individual. Like Wong's fengshui settings and Rebecca's and her brother's rooms, they were tailor-made for their situations. Emmons suggests that, apart from the application on burial, fengshui is used by people for two targets—health and wealth (Emmons 1992: 45). From the informants' stories, wealth and health are definitely mentioned as the things people want through fengshui. However, in addition to those two targets suggested by Emmons, human relationship, particularly at workplaces, seems to be another focus of some of my informants. Another finding is that some people use fengshui because they want to stay the way they are. People apply fengshui to deal with something they cannot control, so as to reduce their anxiety (cf. Malinowski 1922).

From the ethnographic data, the application of fengshui is not stopped by the size of the living of space or economic status of the people. Through various fengshui practices, people can manipulate their living areas to achieve their targets or maximize the benefits. As for the influences from the outside, people still try to make use of them or control them by doing fengshui settings in the interior area. People with more space and higher economic positions can have more choices or freedom in manipulation of space because they can afford to have more space and to pay for professional advice from specialists. More than that, people can use fengshui for both family and even individual interests. In different stages of life and different contexts, they have different anxieties and goals. Therefore, the purposes of fengshui shift according to the personal situation of the fengshui users.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

This thesis has shown how different actors, including fengshui masters and fengshui users, adapt different aspects of the practice of fengshui to assure its survival in modern Hong Kong society. We have seen a number of changes, from increased emphasis on calculation to the rise of celebrity masters, and the shift to emphasis on fengshui inside the home. Small changes enable the tradition to continue and make it modern.

The Thesis of the Thesis

Nina Wang's Case (Chapter 2) was an extreme example of the application of fengshui. In Hong Kong, people have a general idea of fengshui and fengshui masters. For love and harmonious family (her missing husband), and for wealth (her husband's fortune), Nina Wang consulted various fengshui specialists including Tony Chan. What shocked Hong Kong people was not that the billionaire consulted fengshui, but the huge amount of money she spent on it and the allegations of a romantic relationship with Tony Chan. This case shows that the use of fengshui has been widely accepted by the Hong Kong people. The fact that Tony Chan is a fengshui master is not the important issue: the sensational aspects of the story were a will leaving a fortune to an outsider, and the sexual allegations. For some, Tony Chan's profession as fengshui master was an issue; these are a minority who dismiss fengshui as mere "superstition." For many, however, fengshui master is just an occupation like psychiatrist or priest. The fact that a billionaire turned to fengshui and hired several fengshui masters were never doubted by the people in Hong Kong.

Beside the fengshui user, we have many popular fengshui specialists (Chapter

3) in Hong Kong. These fengshui experts are like celebrities. They show up on television programs, they write newspaper columns, they even sing and star in movies. They establish their own image through various appearances, such as arrogant and powerful for So Man-fung, or approachable for Mak Ling-ling. Yet the most important is that they show how professional and capable they are in front of the Hong Kong public, as there is no objective standard to measure the ability of the metaphysicists. Moreover, their exposure helps them to go beyond the common business pattern of personal referrals and to attract clients who are not recommended by existing customers.

Most of the fengshui specialists in Hong Kong do not behave like celebrities. Chapter 4 is about these ordinary fengshui masters, who are mysterious to most people. They are not mysterious because their presence or identity is hidden, but because of questions about how they become fengshui masters, how they earn money and how they solve their clients' life problems. There is no particular formula for becoming a fengshui expert. However, the masters I interviewed regarded themselves as problem solvers for their clients. They also help maintain the social justice through their jobs by helping people with the fengshui knowledge, charging particular people more or even refusing to provide service to the gangs. Unlike the famous masters, they need their clients' recommendations to attract more business. Through visiting other metaphysicists, they learn from others and improve themselves. However, they seem to have a mutual understanding to prevent outsiders from seeing their real secrets—the ways they give consultations to their clients.

In Chapter 5, I used fengshui classes as a way to have a peek into the industry. In these classes, the students tried hard to turn themselves from outsiders to insiders. At the same time, the instructors grasped every chance to sell themselves and their

courses to the learners. In addition, the teaching contents of the classes showed the side of fengshui which can fit into the modern world—more systematic, more direct and more individualistic.

The fengshui users (Chapter 6) I interviewed did not try to convince me that fengshui is real, in contrast to the masters, who repeatedly said that fengshui is not “mysterious” but simply based on calculations, and that if they can do it, so can I. The users were more matter-of-fact about fengshui, while the masters were more dramatic, trying to make the listener believe and emphasize the power of fengshui. Fengshui users arrange the indoor area, and try to control the outer environment from inside the properties. They do what they can, or at least the convenient aspects, in order to achieve their goals—health, wealth, love and so on, depending which stage of life they are at. Economic factors affect the choices of accommodation and the ways they use fengshui, but everything involved is not mysterious or dramatic. After all, fengshui is not something very dramatic, but something that people have seen as a part of their daily life.

Playing Tricks: Me or the Fengshui Masters?

One of my research goals is to investigate how the fengshui specialists “work” in order to convince their clients they are powerful, they can change people’s lives, and they are worth the money. Looking for the metaphysicists’ inside techniques, or tricks, and how the meanings created during the interactions of clients and these masters were still my intention until my original key informant made my first research plan impossible. Coming up with the substitute plan of interviewing some other fengshui masters, I thought my study was a failure since there was no way to “witness” how the masters actually worked on the people and hence impossible to present the real secrets

of how fengshui created a symbolic reality in the process of the consultations. Later I realized that the result was not as bad as I imagined.

Michael Taussig criticizes the way Evans-Pritchard studied Azande witchcraft saying he tricked and exposed the witch doctor in an attempt to reveal something, which was not “culturally appropriate” (Taussig 2003:300). He quotes an example from Evans-Pritchard’s study to illustrate his point: the older anthropologist secretly removed the object, the crucial symbol for the rite of getting the illness out of the body, from the poultice in the healing process (originally in Evans-Pritchard 1937:231, quoted by Taussig 2003:299). To Taussig, this is tricking instead of testing the shaman’s ability.

Moreover, Taussig thinks Evans-Pritchard had put the wrong focus:

He is so busy looking for concealed trickery, he doesn’t realize that he might be a privileged witness of the skilled revelation of such and that the secret is that there is none, or rather, that the secret is a public secret, being that which is generally known but cannot generally be articulated. This is not a question of seeing more or seeing less or seeing behind the skin of appearance. Instead it turns on seeing how one is seeing. Whatever magic is, it must also involve this turn within the known unknown and what this turn turns on, namely a new attitude toward skin (ibid:301-302).

When the researchers put too much effort in disclosing frauds, their position of “observation” may become the power to debunk the informants. If they are too obsessed in doing so, they may ignore other people’s perspective and hence cannot see the whole picture of the creation of reality. I did not intend to debunk the fengshui specialist with my original research method but to follow him to get an in-depth view of how symbolic meanings were created. Hence, the loss of the original plan was not a total disaster. Through interviewing various fengshui specialists, I have a chance to bring their voices to this study. Although somebody may think I have already put my personal judgment on their views, I have tried to bring out a more holistic picture. The back-up plan is not necessarily a less desirable one.

Seeking Power: The Revelation of Concealment

Michael Taussig (2003) suggests

Magic is efficacious not despite the trick but on account of its exposure. The mystery is heightened, not dissipated, by unmasking and in various ways, direct and oblique, ritual serves as a stage for so many unmaskings. Hence power flows not from masking but from unmasking, which masks more than masking. (ibid:273)

Fengshui “works” (in the sense of its having efficacy) not through secrecy but by revealing mysteries. These mysteries include fengshui principles and insights, when masters give advice and teach their clients. They also include the masters’ revelations about tricks used by other specialists. In revealing other masters’ tricks, a master makes himself more convincing. Thus, concealing the secrets of fengshui is not the way practitioners gain the power; it is by disclosing the secrets behind this mysterious practice that fengshui becomes more efficacious.

The first way to show the efficacy of fengshui is by exposing its logic and principles. For example, the fengshui masters tell their clients the hidden problems of their houses, and the simple and yet effective solutions. The clients are convinced by the disclosure of the logic behind the problems and the solutions that their masters and the practice of fengshui are efficacious enough to help solving the problems. At the same time, the fengshui instructors have powers over the students because they let the students know the “secrets” behind their fengshui calculations. Famous metaphysicists gain their power by giving fengshui comments on public issues or teaching fengshui knowledge on television programs, which bring the principles of fengshui to the public. That is why they have more power and they are more convincing than the ordinary fengshui specialists as these well-known specialists have a larger audience to see them unmask the secrets of the knowledge. Apart from proving their own power, these fengshui masters are actually creating a cultural system of fengshui in front of the

public. The more the people are taught, the more they know about fengshui. The efficacy of fengshui is reinforced by this revelation.

The second way of gaining power is to reveal the tricks. Unlike shamans who gain powers by revealing their own tricks, the fengshui specialists I interviewed said that through visiting other metaphysicists or taking other masters' classes, they could explore, or expose, other specialists' techniques. The ordinary fengshui masters pointed out about how their fellow fengshui masters did their business and played tricks on their clients, which, though one might think of as undermining fengshui as a whole, actually distinguished real, skillful masters from the other poor or even fake masters. By telling me as well as their own clients the tricks of various metaphysicists, including those famous fengshui specialists, they could establish a powerful image for themselves as they could distinguish the tricks. For example, they said that they were able to identify which famous fengshui specialists their clients had hired before by examining the setting, even though the client had never mentioned their previous master. For example, a music box was often a sign of the work of So Man-fung. The masters then pointed out what the previous masters had done wrong with the fengshui setting. Because of their ability to point these things out, they show they are in fact more efficacious than the earlier metaphysicists. We can also see the combination of their strong faith and skeptical mind through their frequent visiting of other masters in search of real and useful techniques for their practice. Revealing other masters' hoaxes, as mentioned in the above paragraph, strengthens their faith because they reveal other masters as less able than themselves.

As Taussig says "the need of rites of exposure built into rites of magic in order to strengthen the magic itself" (ibid:298), we can see that the rites of exposure of fengshui not only appear in the personal consultations or in fengshui classes but also in

public media in Hong Kong. These rites can be seen by both believers and non-believers. In Nina Wang's case, different fengshui rites were revealed in court. For instance, life base planting (種生基) was known by the public because of it. This drew other metaphysicists' or columnists' comments and discussions on this rite in the media. It did not matter whether the people clarified the limitations of the rite or suggested the benefits of the recipient or pointed out their doubts toward it. A book about planting life bases written by one of Nina Wang's fengshui specialists was published after the case to explain the ritual. Even though not everyone would adopt the practice after getting all the information, the general public was introduced to this rite which has become more influential than before. Therefore, the strengthening effect is not restricted to a particular audience of believers, and this helps fengshui expand its influence to those who do not intend to use fengshui. In this respect, because a previously secret fengshui practice has been revealed, fengshui has increased in power and influence.

Fengshui Keeps Moving: Faith and Skepticism

The practice of fengshui stays alive, evolves and remains relevant in modern Hong Kong society because of the coexistence of people's faith and skepticism in fengshui. One's ability to disbelieve or to doubt another master's tricks is actually a way to express that he or she knows the real thing and possesses a more powerful secret than the others (Taussig 2003:285). In different contexts, various actors showed their skepticism and faith towards fengshui.

For instance, the fengshui users told me how the previous owners of their properties arranged or decorated the houses in a wrong way, which had the effect of showing how much more knowledgeable they were than the previous owners. Though

they are showing skepticism towards the previous owner's fengshui master, they have faith in their own master. One of my informants changed the usage of a room from bedroom to a study, according to her master's advice. Their skeptical attitudes show they are not the gullible ones. When they exclude factors in their belief and practice that they feel are unbelievable, beliefs and practices they still have are more solid and believable. Skepticism actually strengthens their faith in the fengshui practice. Mr. Cheung (see Chapter 6) is skeptical of fengshui masters, yet re-organizes his flat each year to solve the problem. His faith in fengshui is so strong that he does not need a fengshui master to improve the fengshui of his house. He admits that he cannot afford to hire one, but says that he does not need one anyway. He notes that there is nothing the master could do about some obvious undesirable aspects of his living environment, such as the noisy highway outside his window, and he cannot afford to move to a better flat. At the same time he trusts fengshui itself will bring him luck. That is why he does not give up fengshui despite his financial limitations, and why he re-arranges the fengshui setting every year. This shows that his faith in fengshui remains strong despite his skepticism towards masters and other specialists (This is similar to private investors who are skeptical of professional investment advisors, yet continue to try to beat the market, believing that individual cleverness can bring above average returns, despite the fact that most stock price movement is random.).

In addition, the famous masters criticize other well-known masters' abilities in magazine or newspaper interviews; these specialists create an authoritative image and they compete to be the most powerful one. Michael Taussig looks into the studies by Boas and Hunt about shamanism in Kwakiutl and finds it is crucial to show the skepticism publicly to set up the image of "the principal one" because of the ability to "not believe in all the ways of the shamans, for I had said so aloud to them" (originally

in Boas and Hunt 1930:5, quoted by Taussig 2003:285). This is exactly the case of So Man-fung, the self-claimed-most-famous-and-powerful fengshui master in Hong Kong, who says the other well-known metaphysicists are as good as him and this is the way to show his “super” ability and his superiority over others as he reveals in front of the public. His dramatic skepticism toward other masters does not undermine the fengshui industry, but strengthen his followers’ faith in him, and the public belief in fengshui as a system.

Learning fengshui is a process which also needs both skepticism and faith. It is just like how Taussig describes shamanism: “learning shamanism means doubting it at the same time and that the development of such a split consciousness involving belief and nonbelief is what this learning process is all about” (ibid:285). In the fengshui classes, the students had a faith in fengshui itself that no special talent or ability is required for the learning. The “mysterious” and yet “systematic” fengshui calculation methods were taught in the classes and it was shown that everyone could master the skills once they learned them. After being revealed those principles behind fengshui, the students were drawn to learn more in order to be more professional and that was why more than fifty percent of the students in intermediate courses go to the private advanced course organized privately by the instructor. At the same time, it is how fengshui attracts people. Taussig reviews Boas and Hunt’s studies:

[S]kepticism and belief actively cannibalize one another so that continuous injections of recruits, such as Giving-Potlatches-in-the-World [Hunt], who are full of questioning are required. They are required... as exposer vehicles for confession for the next revelation of the secret contained in the trick that is both art and technique and thus real and the really made up (ibid:288).

The skeptical attitude of the students toward the secrets, as showed in “systematic calculations” in the classes, behind fengshui and their passion to seek further knowledge bring the energy to the belief and make it evolve, or move.

If, like Taussig advises, the witch doctors' mimetic movement of "in" and "out" of the bodies is actually the mirror of the movement "in" and "out" of belief (ibid:288-289), which is necessary for the revelation and concealment, faith and skepticism to mediate, fengshui has a similar process. *Qi* as the core of fengshui has to flow in a right way in order to ensure the fortune. For fengshui, it is the concept behind the fengshui remedies is to put the "wrong" back to the "right" position. In the act of telling the clients how to move the stuff in a right way, fengshui masters disclose the wrong positions and problems, and show their skills to get the things back to the correct positions. By moving the furniture and ornaments into the auspicious spots in the house selectively, fengshui users use their judgment and gain a sense of control over their places and lives. Although the School of Forms in fengshui is not affected by time, the School of Constellation is. The need to move from time to time keeps fengshui from being static. The auspicious direction of this year will become the inauspicious one in the next. "Right" and "wrong" are not definite and they change with time. People's focuses also shift. What is good for one goal at the present may not be right for the next moment. As we can see from some of my informants, who put special fengshui arrangement to get specific things at their particular stage of life, the idea of "moving" allow fengshui users to change the home setting according to their needs, which in fact maintains fengshui relevant to their lives. More than that, the move is not limited to personal household arrangements. The shift of focus in fengshui teaching is a reflection of the alteration of needs due to the changing living environment in general. Through public discourse, the "right" and "wrong" positions of various things are displayed and these values evolves with time as well as the social needs. This transformation enables fengshui to keep its relevance to the Hong Kong society. The move from "wrong" to "right" is the contributions of different

participants.

What I mention in this and the previous paragraphs is similar to the concept of how magical power is constructed socially, as argued by P. Steven Sangren (1987). He argues that *ling*, or efficacy, of the deities does not depend purely on personal experiences of those believers. This power is closely related to the social context as it can be conceived “as a function of their mediating order and disorder with reference to entire set of cosmological categories” (Sangren 1987:230). Fengshui and fengshui masters in Hong Kong actually acquire their power through a similar process because fengshui itself, involving positive and negative *qi*, is a way to identify the right or wrong ways people deal with the environment. That means the order and disorder of the environment, and fengshui is a way of creating order, by identifying disorder such as “killing *qi*” and transforming it into positive *qi* or energy. At the same time, fengshui specialists gain their efficacy by giving advice on how people should handle their living spaces, i.e. how to identify order and disorder. They have the special ability to identify this order and disorder. Furthermore, Sangren (1987:230) suggests that “*ling* replicates both the structure of social relations and the structures of relations among supernatural entities because it is constituted in public rituals on the one hand, and in historical events culturally selected as significant on the other.” In fact, fengshui rituals described in the newspapers and books and depicted in movies and on TV, and the TV programs and the classes in Hong Kong all reproduce the social symbols as well as the logic that makes fengshui meaningful to the Hong Kong public.

Fengshui in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a place where faith and skepticism, revelation and concealment are allowed work together and hence, as Pels (2003) states of Taussig’s idea, “produce

the pervasiveness of magic” (Pels 2003:37). The existence of both faith and skepticism is a crucial condition for the survival of fengshui in Hong Kong. The explicit fengshui users and specialists are not the majority in Hong Kong, and the people I had interviewed only constituted a part of the picture. The complete picture includes non-believers who tolerate and know about fengshui but do not use it, and “anti-believers” who are critical of fengshui, whose views are expressed through the discussions on different media. Faith and skepticism is thus combined at two levels: in the circle of fengshui believers and in Hong Kong society.

As mentioned in the above paragraphs and chapters, various insiders of fengshui keep revealing its secrets in different situations. Through these experiences in this micro-level, they assert their skepticism and seek to eliminate the factors which are not believable or useful for their needs. Their faith in particular masters as well as the practice would be strengthened as the masters and fengshui are efficacious to satisfy their needs, despite their self-professed skepticism.

At the social level, faith and skepticism as a pair also work within an environment containing both believers and non-believers. Fengshui masters skillfully reveal their secrets (both their mysterious knowledge of fengshui principles and the false tricks of other masters) so that they gain influence and convince people of the efficacy of fengshui in the process. Publicizing these revelations brings this magic to the whole society; newspapers thereby indirectly promote fengshui as a system of knowledge. The influence of fengshui is not exclusive to the believers.

This thesis also shows that there is a cultural standard in the Hong Kong community regarding fengshui practices. Any practices that are inordinately expensive, that expect unusual supernatural results, or that involve unusual practices, will be widely criticized in the media, and sometimes even in court. Masters who have

sexual relations with clients are roundly criticized (see Chapter 2), though there have been several cases. We have seen how Nina Wang's huge payments to Tony Chan were also widely criticized. The media commentary strengthens the "standard" use of fengshui by criticizing the abnormal use of the practice. Without the disclosures of the tricks, people would not be attracted and hence no one would keep trying to solve the ambiguity of the ancient practice. Faith and skepticism go together to reinforce the influence of fengshui and this effect covers the whole society as the public take part in the discourse. In the process, some fengshui ideas or techniques may be viewed as useless or unbelievable by the skeptical comments of the general public and hence fade out eventually. However, the continuing revelation of the concealment of fengshui is the secret of the survival of this ancient practice in modern Hong Kong. With the concept of the "move" from "right" to "wrong", the focuses of fengshui, individual or social, evolve and hence remain its relevance. Fengshui in general is preserved and evolves with the society.

The coexistence of faith and skepticism in Hong Kong is the important element that fengshui still exists. Fengshui can tolerate and survive fine with skepticism, which is not true in Christianity and Islam. Not only the insiders but the whole society can take part in removing the questionable elements from the ancient belief and practice. If either faith or skepticism is suppressed from the society, fengshui would not be that firm as the unconvincing factors remains in it. People in Hong Kong, both believers and non-believers, can maintain skepticism towards fengshui and hence help fengshui to remain relevant to modern society. Skepticism reinforces the efficacy of fengshui and this is a continuing process, which holds the role of fengshui in Hong Kong people's life.

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